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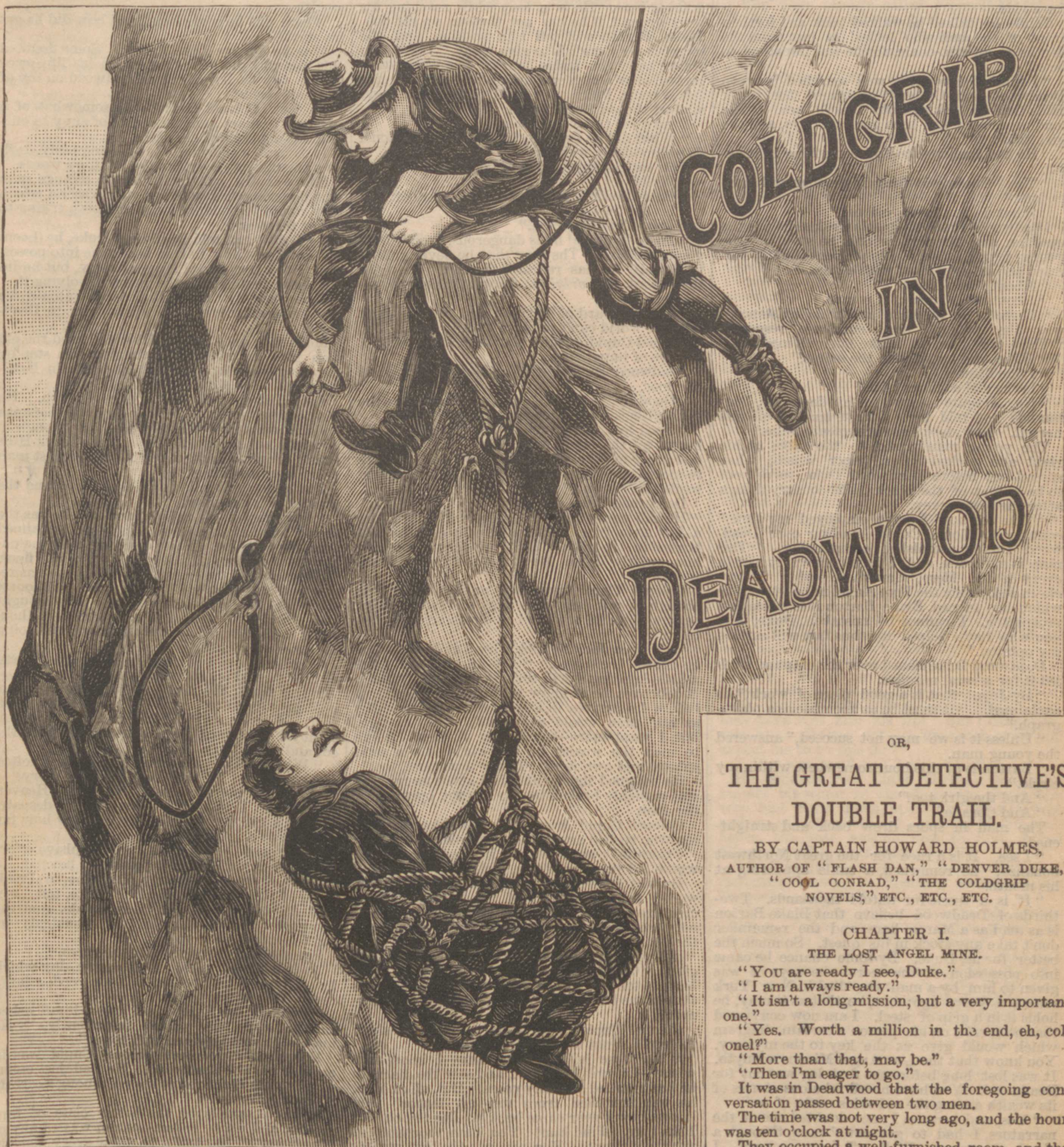
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THEN COLDGRIP, GRIPPING THE NOOSED LARIAT, LEANED WELL FORWARD, HIS EYES FIXED ON HIS SUSPENDED PARD.

OR,
**THE GREAT DETECTIVE'S
DOUBLE TRAIL.**

BY CAPTAIN HOWARD HOLMES,
AUTHOR OF "FLASH DAN," "DENVER DUKE,"
"COOL CONRAD," "THE COLDGRIP
NOVELS," ETC., ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE LOST ANGEL MINE.

"You are ready I see, Duke."

"I am always ready."

"It isn't a long mission, but a very important one."

"Yes. Worth a million in the end, eh, colonel?"

"More than that, may be."

"Then I'm eager to go."

It was in Deadwood that the foregoing conversation passed between two men.

The time was not very long ago, and the hour was ten o'clock at night.

They occupied a well-furnished room, and the person who opened the conversation seemed to be the presiding genius of the place.

He was younger than his companion; in fact, his age did not appear to be more than twenty-five.

Blessed with a perfect figure, a well-molded face, and a pair of brilliant black eyes, he was strikingly handsome. A fine mustache drooped over his mouth, and a perfect shower of dark hair, in which he seemed to take especial pride, touched his shoulders.

He was well, rather stylishly dressed, for the Wild West, while his superiority of character impressed even the most casual observer.

Everybody knew him, and to all he was Colonel Cupid, the youngest bonanza king of the Northwest.

What a contrast between him and his companion.

Tall, almost gigantic in proportions, was the man who stood before the young Black Hills nabob.

He was past forty, rugged yet agile, not handsome, but with an impressive face and demeanor.

"Dark of skin, with not a vestige of beard on his clean-cut face, behind which his hair was kept closely cropped, Deadwood Duke, as well known as the young master whom he served, stood over six feet in his riding boots.

He was sometimes called the Deadwood Centaur from his partiality for the saddle, in which he was truly at home; but he did not like the name.

When he stood before young Colonel Cupid on the night that introduces both men to the reader he wore a spur on his left heel, and, it with other articles of dress, told that he was equipped for a ride.

While he talked he walked back and forth in front of the man who looked at him from the depths of an arm-chair, for he was impatient to be off.

"I want the country well searched between Deadwood and Custer," continued the Black Hills Cressus, looking into Duke's face. "The mad prospector has been gone six days, and the girl, too."

"He has had time to find something if it exists."

"Yes. The whole thing is peculiar and mysterious."

"What do you think, colonel?"

Deadwood Duke broke his walk as he put the question, and the next second he stood at the young man's chair, his figure bent slightly forward and his eyes filled with eagerness.

"About what, Duke?"

"About the bonanza, of course."

"There is no question about its existence," was the prompt and emphatic response.

"There is method in Blake Barton's madness."

"Where did he get onto the secret?"

"I don't know."

"Is the girl a sharer of it?"

"No. Despite his love for his daughter, Barton has not told her. Coralie has told me this herself. Now, look here a moment, Duke."

The young man turned to the table at his right and picked up a paper which, when spread out before Deadwood Duke, turned out to be a map of the Black Hills country drawn after the best survey.

"You see how I have employed my time," continued Colonel Cupid, smiling over Deadwood Duke's astonished countenance. "This map is my work, and I have drawn it out in every detail. Here, somewhere within this circle in red, exists the Lost Angel mine—the mine which has turned Blake Barton into a sleepless prospector. I cannot be mistaken, Duke, and you who have helped me thus far, will sustain my opinion."

Deadwood Duke leaned over the map and studied it for several minutes.

"By Jove! that is a good piece of work!" he exclaimed. "It must be as accurate as a photograph."

"Unless it is we may not succeed," answered the young man.

"Barton is at this hour somewhere within my circle."

"And the girl, too?"

"And Coralie."

The man in spurs drew back and straightened.

"I see. It is a race for the great Northwest bonanza," he remarked, a smile appearing at his mouth.

"It is a tussle for untold thousands. Two-thirds of Deadwood believe that Blake Barton is as mad as a March hare, and the remainder don't take any stock in his quest. So much the better for us, Duke. By some chance he came into possession of the secret—he says it was given to him by a man who died in New York some ten years ago; but, be that as it may, he holds it in a grip of steel. I am now convinced that he carries on his person a certain diagram which would give us the key to the mystery. You know that the Lost Angel Mine is no myth. It was lost long before the first log was cut for Deadwood. You have heard fabulous stories of its wealth among the red-skins north of us."

"Yes, and because I once doubted one of the narrators, I had to get out o' camp through a cloud of arrows. Well, off I am, colonel. I guess I've got both the country and your instructions in my head. Let me look at your

circle once more. Oh! I have it now! If I don't find Blake Barton and dog him to the door of the bonanza, may I never see Deadwood again."

"One word!" cried the young nabob, lifting his hand as Deadwood Duke was about to touch the brim of his hat before departing.

The Centaur stood still.

"I have seen nothing of the syndicate's agent," continued Colonel Cupid. "I know that he left New York some months ago. He is employed by a lot of Eastern capitalists with an unlimited amount of means to back them, to find the same mine which is Blake Barton's quest. I think the agent gave up the job long ago. You can't catch foxes in the Black Hills with city hounds!"

"But this one, they say, is good everywhere."

"Who says so?" asked the Deadwood nabob.

"I've heard it more than once. Isn't he Captain Coldgrip?"

"Yes."

"Well, he has caught men and solved puzzles in this part of the country. He is a hound for any trail."

"Has he been to Deadwood?"

"He has, and made his mark, too."

"Who knows him here?"

"Among several, Jacinto Jack does."

"Jacinto Jack, eh?" exclaimed Colonel Cupid, as if making a mental memorandum of the information. "So he knows this sleuth whom the syndicate of the seaboard has sent out to find the Lost Angel?"

"He told me so."

"Well, Duke, the syndicate might as well keep its money. Its Broadway ferret finds nothing here. He is a long while reaching his work-ground, if he has not thrown up the job. Blake Barton will tell him nothing, and the secret is not Coralie's to give away. Don't you see we have the inside track? We work on a certain clew which encourages us. Let the city ferret come, Duke. I would like to play a hand against the syndicate's man."

Deadwood Duke was silent.

"What did he ever do in the West?" Colonel Cupid suddenly went on.

"He caught Injun Nick for one thing."

"Well?"

"He settled Richard Redhilt for another."

"Is that the man?"

"The identical person."

"Then, by Jove! he is dangerous," replied the young nabob. "They say that he never quits a trail until he has reached the end. They say this about the original Captain Coldgrip, remember."

"I never heard of but one, and Jacinto Jack says the world can't produce two."

Colonel Cupid pushed the map back with a gesture of impatience.

Deadwood Duke saw it and stepped toward the door.

"Good-by," he said, touching his hat as the young Black Hills mine-speculator looked up.

"Good-by. Bring me a good report. No harm to the girl, remember. We want the secret her mad father holds. Sam will be here to-morrow, and we will hold the Deadwood fort while you're gone."

Deadwood Duke was gone.

He had vaulted into a saddle waiting for him a few steps from the house, and one of the best horses in the Black Hills region was bearing him swiftly down the streets of noisy Deadwood.

Colonel Cupid remained at the table long enough to put away the map and some other papers, then he snatched up his hat and turned to go.

"I'll open Jacinto Jack's head and get out all he knows!" he vowed. "This information comes a little late, but I will turn it to my advantage. It behooves me to know all about this Coldgrip before he arrives in Deadwood, if he is coming at all. Men would say I had money enough, but I want more—more! By Jupiter! I'd like to melt the wealth of the world into a solid sphere, and own it all. I have a purpose, too."

He laughed lightly at this, but his merriment was suddenly broken by the abrupt opening of the door.

Colonel Cupid drew back at sight of the person who rushed across the threshold.

"Coralie!" he cried. "In Heaven's name, where did you come from, girl?"

He was answered by a wild exclamation that welled from the heart of the beautiful young creature before him, and if Colonel Cupid had not thrown out his arm she would have fallen to the floor.

"Find him!—father!—father!" wailed the girl. "Oh, Leon, you will hear me! I came back to tell you all. I have the secret—the one that turned his head, and finally parted us forever!"

Colonel Cupid's eyes lit up with a flash which the girl did not interpret.

"We were in the mountains—I know not where—I heard his secret, and saw the diagram he has guarded so many years. But, all at once, he was snatched from me—my father! God knows how I ever came back to Deadwood, but I am here. Find him! You have thousands at your command. You can put the best trailers in the land on his track. Do it and the secret of the Lost Angel Mine is yours. I don't want

an ounce of its wealth. It has shadowed me with a curse!" And Coralie Barton threw her hands to her head, and breaking from Colonel Cupid's arms, fell senseless at his feet.

The Deadwood nabob contemplated her with a quiet smile.

CHAPTER II.

JACINTO JACK.

LEON TALBOT was the other name of the man commonly called Colonel Cupid.

He had come to Deadwood nearly three years previous to the opening of our romance, and such had been his luck that everything he touched seemed to turn to gold.

He had mines, great, paying mines they were, too, in almost every direction from the capital of the Black Hills.

One peculiarity about him was that he had no partners. Everything he owned he held in a grip which the shrewdest sharpers of the wild West could not loosen.

There were rumors to the effect that Colonel Cupid had silent partners in some of his enterprises, but no one offered any positive information on this point.

Now and then he was seen with several men at his house. One of these individuals was Deadwood Duke, another was known as Shasta Sam, and the third did not come often enough to let the Deadwooders fix him in name or habitation.

Talbot's age excited some comment among those who came later to Deadwood and found so young a man the possessor of so much wealth.

Where did he come from, and how did he get his start?

Was he always Leon Talbot? Some doubted this, for why did he keep silent on his life prior to the day he bowled into Deadwood on top of the mail-coach?

In fact, Colonel Cupid was somewhat of a mystery to many, and an object of envy to one-half the denizens of the Hills.

It is not wonderful that his intensely dark eyes should snap over Coralie Barton's words.

She was the only child of the strange man who had come to Deadwood with a secret which fifty would-be bonanza kings had been trying to get at for years.

As Talbot had told Deadwood Duke, he (Leon) did not know how Barton had come into possession of the Lost Angel Mine mystery, but he did not doubt that he held the means of solving it.

This was why Colonel Cupid had watched the mad prospector ever since his coming to Deadwood.

More than once had big Duke followed the old man into the mountains, dogging him step by step, and tracking him from his home in Deadwood and back again.

Leon Talbot had not mines enough. He wanted one more and that one was the bonanza which some people believed was vast enough to purchase all the gold veins in the Black Hills country, and to make its owner the richest man of the bonanza kings.

But let us go back to Colonel Cupid and the prospector's daughter.

"Heavens! if all this is true—if she has the secret, I am at the door of success!" exclaimed the Dakota mine owner, stooping over the unconscious girl and lifting her from the floor. "She must tell me everything when she has recovered and is herself once more. Of course she came straight to my house. She brought the secret to the very man who can give thousands for it, but, if I am not mistaken, it is going to cost me very little."

Coralie Barton soon awoke in a semi-darkened chamber which she knew was not her own.

"This is not the heart of the mountains! no, no!" she murmured. "Ah! I see, I am under a roof. Where am I?" And then, as if in an instant all came back to her, she sprang from the cot and rushed to a door.

"Why did I come to this house?" the excited girl went on. "Did I tell him my story? I wonder if I betrayed father's secret? Heaven pity me if I turned traitor, in my despair! Where is Colonel Cupid? I will know how far I went when I see him."

She opened the door with an impulsive effort and rushed out into the larger room beyond.

There were no princely mansions in Deadwood at the time of which I write, but Leon Talbot's house was luxurious inside, and the prospector's daughter stopped suddenly at sight of the display around her.

She was the only person in the room.

As it still was night of the same day which had witnessed her return to Deadwood, a lamp revealed the room to her.

"Will he come, or must I seek him?" asked Coralie while she waited impatiently. "He may have heard me and will come."

But at that moment Colonel Cupid was in another part of Deadwood. He had just entered a famous night resort known among a certain class as "Fortune's Folly."

It was a sample of the better class of faro resorts, and while Talbot seldom wasted any of his money at the table, he knew every place in Deadwood where it could be wasted.

There stood at one end of the rather hand-

some counter in the bar a little man whose mustache curled gracefully toward a pair of Mexican eyes, black and vicious.

Colonel Cupid seemed to single out this individual the moment he entered the house, and three strides on his part brought the two men together.

"Are you busy, Jacinto?" asked the young nabob leaning toward the man who had apparently discovered that he was wanted.

"Not if you want me, colonel," came the answer promptly spoken.

"Then I want you."

As prompt to obey as he had been to answer, Jacinto Jack gave his mustachios an extra twirl and followed Talbot from the house.

Colonel Cupid was not going back to his private office under the same roof that sheltered Coralie.

He led the way down the street without speaking, and in time ushered Jacinto Jack into a room as dark as the crypts of Egypt.

"By Jove! I am under ground!" thought Jack. "He has brought me to one of his private offices among the mines. In fortune's name, what business can he have with me?"

A match snapped as it ignited and Jacinto Jack saw that he had rightly located himself. He was under ground, and without doubt in one of Colonel Cupid's mines.

"Now to business," said Talbot when he had lighted a candle, and motioned his companion to one of the two chairs at a rough little table. "You have seen some of the world I believe, Jacinto Jack?"

A smile came to the dandified man's lips. It was a smile for the, to him, startling oddity of the question.

"Yes," with another twist of the mustache. "I've knocked about the footstool some, colonel."

"East and West, eh?"

"From sea to sea."

"Then, I want to ask you one important question. Did you ever meet a person called Captain Coldgrip?"

"The detective, eh?" laughed Jack much to Talbot's surprise.

"The New York sleuth," repeated the nabob.

"I've met him."

"Where?"

"In New York."

"When?"

Jack's brow grew serious.

"A year ago for the last time I should think," he replied suddenly brightening.

"What kind of man is he?"

"One I wouldn't like to have after me if I was wanted by the authorities," grinned Jacinto.

"You know him well, do you?" asked Colonel Cupid not appearing to notice Jack's remark.

"I cannot say that I do."

"But you have really seen him you tell me?"

"Oh yes, as I told you."

"Never outside of New York, I presume?"

"Once."

"Where was he then?"

"Here."

The laconic answer gave Talbot a slight start. Jack distinctly saw him catch his breath.

"When was he here, Jack?"

The womanish hand of the Deadwood dandy went up to the well twirled mustache once more.

"What does he want to know all this for?" thought Jack. "Something is in the wind when this Deadwood adventurer seeks information about the New York shadow."

"Don't you want to tell me?" continued Talbot, leaning forward, while one of his hands stole toward Jacinto Jack like a creeping serpent. His eyes seemed to grow dangerous, and the Black Hill's sport knew enough about Colonel Cupid to want no disagreement with him there.

"No," Jack said, "I have no reason for keeping anything back. You will pardon me. I was only thinking. What was it you asked me, colonel?"

"When did you see this Captain Coldgrip in Deadwood?"

The diversion, brief as it was, had given Jacinto Jack a breathing spell.

He now looked like a man who had his mind made up, and who was willing to talk.

"He was here a month ago," he replied.

"So late as that?" exclaimed Talbot startled by the information; "and was he alone?"

"He seemed to be."

"What was his mission?"

"Aha!" laughed Jack. "You are giving me credit for being a great deal sharper than I am. Captain Coldgrip did not think it necessary to divulge his business to Jacinto Jack."

Colonel Cupid was in no humor to enjoy this bit of sarcasm. He bit his lip and went on:

"How long did he stay in Deadwood?"

"I cannot tell."

"Nor when he departed?"

"No."

"Was he in disguise?"

"Not much, if in any. I should have known him anywhere."

The young mine-owner did not continue for a minute.

"Have you any idea what fetched this man

to the Hills?" slowly asked the colonel, with his eyes fixed on the Deadwood sport. "You see I put the question squarely, Jack, and I want the truth. Now go on."

Jacinto Jack shook his head.

"How could I have any ideas about a mission which Captain Coldgrip keeps to himself?" he answered.

Talbot's countenance fell.

"That will do," he remarked. "You will not mention my inquisition to any one, Jacinto."

"Why should I?"

"That is true. I never forget those who serve me."

Five minutes afterward Jacinto Jack stood at the counter of Fortune's Folly, holding between him and the light a glass of his favorite drink.

"I'm much obliged to you, Jacinto," said a voice, as if lips had spoken the words at his ear.

Jack turned with a thrill, and almost lost his grip on the glass.

There were a dozen men within elbow touch of him, but for his life he could not have told which one had spoken.

CHAPTER III.

A CHECKMATED GOLD-BUG.

THE Deadwood nabob went home.

He had obtained from Jacinto Jack a bit of information that he did not like.

As we have seen, he knew, or professed to know, that a syndicate of rich men in New York had placed upon the trail of the Lost Angel Mine a man whose fame extended over the continent.

Talbot had hoped that no one would appear on the scene to step between him and the bonanza; that, with the help of Deadwood Duke and several other cool-headed fellows, he could grasp Barton's secret and reach the coveted prize. He was in love with Coralie, the prospector's daughter, but he knew that the girl cared nothing for him, despite his wealth.

This fact did not deter the Deadwood gold prince. There would come a time when Coralie would be glad to accept him, for his money had made him all-powerful, perfectly resistless he confidently thought.

If he had followed Jacinto Jack to Fortune's Folly, he might have seen the man who had spoken the startling words: "I'm much obliged to you, Jacinto;" but, anxious to greet Coralie after her return to consciousness, he hurried back to his residence.

He had not been gone long, but during the time the mad prospector's child had recovered to find herself under the Deadwood speculator's roof.

When he entered the house he was surprised to find her in the luxurious room.

He advanced toward her with a smile.

"You are better, Coralie, and I am glad of it," Talbot exclaimed.

"I have partially recovered, but why am I here?" was the response. "Why did I desert him and leave him to his fate in the mountains? The curse of Heaven must rest upon the head of Coralie Barton for deserting her father."

"Nay, my dear girl. You came back to get me to assist in finding him," said the young nabob. "You could not aid him by staying in the hills. What happened? Tell me."

"I can do that in very few words. You know he left Deadwood six days ago. He slipped away when I was temporarily absent from the house, but I knew he had gone in search of the lost mine which occupied his thoughts to the exclusion of everything save his love for me. I did not publish his departure, but followed him quietly, not finding him till the second day, and then by accident. All my persuasion could not induce him to turn his face toward home. He declared that he was going to find the mine before returning, and I resolved to stay with him."

"Several days passed. I need not describe our wanderings. Wherever he went he had me at his side. He passed from trail to trail, now with his strange diagram in his hand, and now with it concealed in his bosom. I got but little rest at night, for he continually dragged me on and on; his one great desire rendered him tireless. Last night—it may have been longer ago, for my brain has been in a whirl ever since the occurrence—we were in camp in the heart of the wildest region we had yet found."

"Father was asleep—asleep for the first time in many hours, as if Heaven had pitied him and given his brain rest. Not far away I sat watching him, for the soft moonlight stealing down through the trees, showed me his face. All at once there were steps near by, and the next instant I was in the grasp of a lot of mountain robbers. I have seen men like them in Deadwood—great, burly fellows, rough in voice and action, desperate and merciless. Father fell into the hands of others the same time I was secured. I begged them to spare his life, and they laughed, saying that he was worth millions to them if they had caught the right man."

"I was not permitted to go to him, although I tried to do so. My entreaties, my tears, were unavailing with those Black Hills desperadoes. I was placed on my horse and was led from the camp, whither I know not. My conductors

maintained a silence which almost drove me mad. Over the upper part of their faces they wore dark masks, but they were long-haired men, well bearded and powerfully built."

"At last I was told I was free, and when I looked for the masked robbers not one was to be seen. I sat in my saddle in a part of the mountains totally unknown to me as it was observed in the moonlight. My brain reeled. I knew not which way to turn. To me there was no back trail, for the grass that hid my horse's feet gave me no clew. There was but one thing for me to do, and I did it. I went forward, trusting to the sagacity of my horse. When morning broke, I was still among the giant hills. Heaven knows what became of father. Tired, hungry and exhausted, I succumbed to sleep. How sweet it was! All day, all night and perhaps longer still, for I could not count the hours, I went hither and thither, in search of the robbers' victim. At last the lights of Deadwood appeared in front of me. I took hope and courage, and— But you know the rest, Leon."

Coralie ceased and looked into the face of the man who had listened to her narrative with absorbed interest.

Once during the story he had started, and that was when Coralie reached the point descriptive of the masked robbers' swoop.

"I am glad you came to me," Colonel Cupid declared. "I am at your service in any manner you wish to command me."

"A thousand thanks!" exclaimed Coralie. "You have always called yourself his friend. He trusted you further than you think, and I believe he would have told me to come to you if he could have spoken his wishes before we parted."

Talbot was pleased with the girl's frankness.

"I have at my command some of the best mountain trailers whom gold can hire," he went on.

"Is the Deadwood Centaur one of them?"

"He is."

"And Shasta Sam?"

"I see you know some of my men," smiled Talbot. "But, I have others besides them," he added quickly.

Coralie had change color, and there was an expression of aversion in her face.

"One of the two men she has mentioned she does not like," thought Talbot. "I think it is Deadwood Duke, but I'll let it go for the present."

"Can you not see the notice that inspired the brigands?" he asked.

"Ah! that is clear," cried Coralie. "They want the secret he carries. Those men are hunting the Lost Angel Mine, and they are ready to do anything to reach its closed door."

"That is true. They must be met with weapons capable of baffling them. The mine must be found by us as soon as possible."

The girl seemed to draw back.

"It may have to be defended against those mountain cut-throats," he continued. "It may be necessary to throw into the mine a force of men as determined as the band who pounced upon you in your little camp. Force must be met with force, stratagem with stratagem. Coralie, the band of Leon Talbot is at your service. I will begin to-night, and, in order to equip me for the campaign, you have only to tell me what you may have discovered about the bonanza."

If Colonel Cupid doubted whether he had before startled the prospector's daughter by his language, his doubts vanished now.

"I cannot do that!" cried Coralie. "Ask anything else at my hands. I believe I have discovered the secret father has guarded so well—the fatal gold-mine secret which, ere this, may have cost him his life. But I cannot betray him. Do you not ask too much when you expect me to go this far?"

Talbot was perplexed, but not baffled.

He believed that Blake Barton's refusal to impart his secret to the desperate characters who had come down upon him like a pack of wolves, would eventually cost him his life, and hence, the only avenue now to Lost Angel Mine, seemed to lie through Coralie.

"If this girl outwits me, may I become a mountain tramp," he mentally exclaimed, ere he moved again to the attack.

"Very well," he said, in an assumed careless manner. "You want your father found but you refuse to fully arm the rescuers."

"No, no! Don't think me indifferent," and Coralie threw a look of entreaty into Talbot's face. "All the love I am capable of yielding to any one is his. His poor disordered brain—the lost mine has done it all—hastighted about him the cords of my affection. But I cannot—I dare not, and heaven helping me, I will not betray his secret!"

Never before had Coralie appeared so lovely to the young Croesus of Deadwood, and he was thrilled by her beauty while her obstinacy maddened him.

For several moments Talbot looked up at her from his chair.

"She won't keep that up long," he muttered. "She said when she first came to my house that she would give me the secret for her fa-

ther's return. Reflection has changed her mind. Awhile ago the lost bonanza had shadowed her with a curse; now she is as eager to get at its riches as ever her father was. Coralie, my dear, you are fickle like your sex; but just now you are dealing with Leon Talbot, who has yet to be beaten in a single game!"

"If you cannot help me without possessing my knowledge of the secret, I must go elsewhere," Coralie resumed. "I might have sought other assistance in the first place. My father is to be rescued from the masked hawks of the mountains. My life shall be devoted to rescue and vengeance. Pardon me for disturbing you with my presence, Leon Talbot. If I have misjudged you, it has been my fault."

The gold-bug of Deadwood saw Coralie turn away with a look not difficult to interpret.

He was about to lose the beautiful creature and the gold secret, both at the same time.

"Good-night. I have a home to which I can go," continued the girl. "Perhaps I should have gone to it first."

Her hand was on the knob.

"One moment!" he cried, leaving the chair.

"No! you can't buy the secret," and the eyes that confronted Talbot were seen to flash.

"But you will hear me?"

"Not to-night. He can be found without the paid trailers of the Black Hills Mine Prince."

"It is false!—false!" and Talbot lifted a clinched hand in emphasis. "I wield more power in this part of the world than people dream of. Without my intervention, your father is lost, and lost forever!"

There was no cry of horror after this vehement outburst. Coralie's figure straightened, and her eyes seemed to get an intenser light.

"Good-night, Mr. Talbot!" she spoke again in tones that cut like a Damascus blade, and when the nabob of Deadwood recovered, she was gone.

"She must not leave me in this pet!" he cried, rushing away. "I hear her leaving the house. I will follow her home, but what I overtake her."

Out of the house he rushed.

A figure was just before him—the figure of the prospector's daughter.

Colonel Cupid sprang forward, and put out his hand.

"Don't touch that girl!" cried a stern voice, and Talbot was thrown ten feet toward the house he had just left.

CHAPTER IV.

THE MAN WITH TWO NAMES.

THE person who had stepped between the prospector's daughter and Talbot received a look of surprise from the young girl.

He was blessed with a physique apparently capable of contending with the most agile of men, and Coralie could see that, while he was not handsome, he had a face by no means disengaging.

He was no longer young, nor had he reached the fiftieth mile-stone of life.

"You have not lived long in Deadwood?" Coralie said to this man.

"Not long," was the reply, with the semblance of a smile at the speaker's lips.

"I have never seen you before, and do not know to whom I am indebted for the introduction."

"If you want a name call me Brashwood—Bent Brashwood," rejoined the man.

"From where?" asked Coralie, mechanically.

"From everywhere. I guess I have no fixed habitation. I can call Deadwood home, and not stretch the cloth much. This is your home, is it not?"

"It is, and my house is here," and Coralie looked at the little frame building they had just reached. "Do you think the man you struck intended to stop me?"

"Undoubtedly; but I did not strike him. I merely threw him back; no harm done, I assure you. It cost me an effort to keep from knocking him lengthwise. I don't like gold-bugs—especially curs like Leon Talbot."

The prospector's daughter stood at the door of her own home while the man spoke.

He was a stranger, but he looked like a cool, determined and sagacious fellow.

Why could she not trust him? and just then she stood in need of friends.

"Do you know the mountains round about Deadwood?" suddenly questioned the girl.

"I know them tolerably well."

"Well enough to try to find a person lost among them?"

"I cannot say."

There was no braggadocio about the man.

"Come in and let us talk together," and Coralie held the door open.

She seemed struck by the promptness with which the strange man accepted the invitation.

He did not hesitate a second, but passed the threshold and stood for the first time under Blake Barton's roof.

In the lamplight Coralie received a more favorable impression of the person she had admitted.

She did not hesitate to tell the story of her father's quest and her own adventures in the mountains.

"Is that all?" asked the man when she had concluded.

"What do you think I have kept back?"

"Something very important."

"Name it."

"You must know something about the lost Angel Mine secret."

Coralie started.

Here was another person who wanted to find the famous and fatal bonanza of the Black Hills.

Had fate thrown him across her path?

Were all men after the one prize which had cost her father his reason, if not his life?

"Merciful Father! do you, too, seek it with the rest?" exclaimed Coralie.

Bent Brashwood smiled.

"I am one of the thousand," he replied. "But I do not want you to betray your father. No, I am not in Deadwood for that purpose. Will you tell me the truth? Do you know the secret he claims to have discovered?"

"I know all he knows," Coralie said firmly, looking steadily into the man's face.

"He has the diagram?"

"He had it when the masked men came down on us in the mountains."

Brashwood looked toward the door, and then took a step toward the girl.

"Let me have your attention for a moment," he went on, taking a folded paper from his pocket, and opening it before Coralie's eyes. "Is your father's map of the Lost Angel country anything like this?"

He spread the paper out on the table in the light of the little lamp.

Blake Barton's daughter leaned forward with intense curiosity rising in her eyes.

She looked at the map steadily for a minute; then she turned the batteries of her expressive eyes full upon the stranger.

"Where did you get this map?" she demanded.

"It is like your father's, then?"

Coralie made no reply.

"You need not tell me," said Brashwood.

"But I will meet you more than half way by telling you where I came across my map. It was obtained in New York."

"Where father got his!" and the mad gold-seeker's daughter seemed to catch herself, and she looked like a person who unthoughtedly had told too much.

"But he did not get his map where I got mine," continued the man. "There is something singular about the lost bonanza. The same story never comes alike to two persons. All narratives locate it in the Black Hills, but no two in the same vicinity."

"When did you start out to hunt it?"

"When I received my commission."

Coralie drew slightly back, and looked strangely at the man in the lamplight.

"Then you have been sent?" she asked slowly, but ere he could answer, her face suddenly brightened. "Are you Captain Coldgrip?" she demanded.

At this unexpected question, a smile appeared on Brashwood's face.

"I am not Captain Claude, whom you seem to know," he answered.

"You are wrong. I do not know him," returned Coralie quickly. "I only know that such a person exists, that he is a famous detective in New York—a man renowned for solving mysteries as deep as that of the Lost Angel Mine. I have never seen this detective, hence my question, called forth by your own words. My father has often talked about him. He used to say that if he did not find the mine soon, Captain Coldgrip would strike the trail."

"What if he is at work now?"

"I would not be surprised. I wish he were here. I would enlist him in my cause. I would send him to the mountains in search of my father. Where is the American sleuth?"

"He is nearer than the gold cabal thinks," was the response. "The finding of your father may involve the safety of the secret. More than one man hopes to be the first to reach the portals of the lost bonanza. There is another trail connected with it—a trail of which, as yet, you know nothing, girl. The man whose house you have just left is bending all his energies to the discovery of the Lost Angel. He sent from Deadwood to-night one of his men on a mission of some sort. Well, let the Centaur gallop for the present. The golden keys of Colonel Cupid can unlock a thousand powers. In his hands money is an all-powerful agent; but, nabobs have become beggars before this, my child. Simply because I have not been in Deadwood long, you must not think I know nothing about Leon Talbot. He had a different name in a different place. You want to call Captain Coldgrip your friend. You can do so. He is that now!"

Coralie sprang toward the speaker with an exclamation which she could not keep back.

"Then I have a friend!" she cried. "Never again will I go to Colonel Cupid for help. If you are not Captain Coldgrip, you are very near the Atlantic sleuth."

"Right you are, girl. Awhile ago I was Bent Brashwood. Now I will unmask a little. I have a name which is never heard west of the Missouri. I am Sunshine Sam."

"The detective's assistant?"

"His right bower, if I do say so myself," was the reply.

"Keep the secret you refused to give up to Leon Talbot awhile ago. The nabob of Deadwood is not going to stop at his first effort to obtain it."

"Never will I surrender it to him!" Coralie cried. "He said that without his intervention my father was lost forever."

"There was a threat in that, Coralie."

"And a threat which I plainly saw. With Captain Coldgrip for a friend and ally, the nabob of the Black Hills will never reach the mouth of the lost bonanza."

"The captain might fail," suggested the man, with a smile.

"They say he never does that."

Sunshine Sam, or Bent Brashwood, consulted his watch.

"We are going to take up your mountain trail," he said, looking once more into Coralie's face.

"Then he is not lost?"

"Let the results determine that. The masked robbers will not relinquish him while he holds the secret they want."

"It may be a wild trail for Captain Coldgrip."

"A wild trail is his delight. He left New York on a double one. He wants a gold mine and a man. A thousand to one, girl, that he gets both."

Coralie saw the flash that appeared in the depths of the man's eyes. She held out her hands.

"God speed you both!" she exclaimed. "Say to Captain Coldgrip that on this mission the prayers of Coralie Barton follow him. They go with you, also, if you go with him. Now I shall sleep and dream of rescue."

"As pretty as a picture!" ejaculated the man as he emerged from Barton's house.

He went forward, a dozen steps, and then came a voice that pierced like an arrow.

"That is the man! Now, do your duty!"

The next second three figures sprang at him, silent but panther-like.

Sunshine Sam halted and threw a swift hand back; but, he was in the trio's grip before he could draw.

Two more men came to the help of the three.

A tarred rope was at once thrust between the prisoner's jaws and another secured his wrists. Then he was led away and seated upon a horse.

About him were a dozen mounted men, and in the best hand of each was a cocked six-shooter.

CHAPTER V.

AN OATH RENEWED.

It dawned on the prisoner in an instant that one man had planned and directed the assault.

"The nabob of Deadwood is showing his hand rather soon in the game," thought Sunshine Sam as the cavalcade moved off with himself in the center. "He did not like my interference of awhile ago, and I presume I am to feel his power. Well, I took chances when I came to Deadwood in the captain's service, and I'm not the man to give up, though I'm in Colonel Cupid's trap."

Sunshine Sam looked anxiously toward the house he had just left. He wondered if Coralie knew anything about his capture.

The girl may have heard the voice of command which had directed the men to the attack; but he hoped she had not.

The men in the saddles did not speak, and the prisoner was conducted down the street and turned toward the gold hills that lay beyond.

As the band passed the last cabin in Deadwood, a four-horse stage, clumsy, dusty and bearing marks of much usage and hard times, rattled into town at the other end, and pulled up in front of a rather pretentious two-story house called by courtesy a hotel.

Throwing the lines down, the driver scrambled from his perch with more agility than he usually exhibited, and opened the door of the vehicle.

"Blamed if Old Hank hasn't a passenger this time!" exclaimed a man who from the hotel porch saw the person who stepped from the stage.

It was a woman, rather tall, gracefully formed, and with a captivating face.

A smile of satisfaction came into existence as she thanked the driver, and then threw a look toward the hotel.

"This is the place; the Gold Brick," said Old Hank, and his sole passenger walked up the three steps to the porch, and into the building.

"Hyer's a lady, colonel," announced the man who had witnessed the unloading, and a short, heavy-set little person beyond the door opened his eyes and stared at his guest.

"Colonel" is a title promiscuously distributed over some portions of our country, especially in the West and South, and many of the dignitaries who wear it with considerable grace, never inhaled the odor of burned powder on the tented field.

It was thus with the proprietor of the Gold Brick Hotel. He was "colonel" by courtesy,

and not by reason of any military fame or experience.

He knew how to welcome guests; he had a loose tongue and a good amount of wit, and when the guest was one of the tender sex, which was not often, Colonel Eagle spread himself, and murdered the king's English at the same time.

On this occasion the sight of Old Hank's passenger in his doorway, instantly gave edge to his intellect, and the woman, just a little impatient, was forced to hear him through.

"Want to abide in the Gold Brick, eh?" finished the landlord. "The best apartments in the house are at your service. We have here the Lord's country, and I welcome you to Deadwood, destined in time to be the metropolis of the continent."

The strange guest was escorted to "the best apartment" by Colonel Eagle, after which the landlord went back to his quarters, and congratulated himself on his efforts with the aid of a black bottle, with which he was on excellent terms.

"Colonel Eagle, I believe?" said a voice which caused the Deadwood landlord to turn, for it was a strange one.

"Colonel Phoenix Eagle, and you?"

"Benjamin Byrd."

"Any title, sir?"

This was the landlord's famous question ever since he had entertained several English lords on a tour of the new West.

"No title, colonel," was the answer. "In that respect I am not as fortunate as my fellow-man. I am simply Benjamin Byrd."

"Did you come in with Hank just now?"

"I did not, if you mean the stage-driver. I wish to see the lady who did come with him, though."

Colonel Eagle's look seemed to become a stare.

"I beg pardon, Mr. Byrd. To what particular person do you refer?"

Did Benjamin Byrd's eyes get a certain twinkle, or was the landlord of the Gold Brick mistaken?

"I refer to the lady who is your guest. Ah! you cannot misunderstand me, Colonel Eagle. I wish to see her, I say."

"When?"

"Now."

"But she may have retired."

"She is not in that haste," replied Byrd, smiling, just as if he knew.

"I will take your name up to her. Benjamin Byrd, eh?"

"Don't go off like an arrow," cried the other, detaining the colonel with a hand on his arm as he started off. "I am no stranger to your female guest. She is up-stairs, is she? Which room? Number four? Thanks. Nothing more is necessary."

"The deuce take his coolness," broke forth the colonel when he saw the man disappear beyond the stair door. "He'll learn some politeness if he stays here long. Must have known she was coming in to-night. Looks that way." And Phoenix Eagle went back to the black bottle to find solace for his chagrin.

Meanwhile the passenger of the Deadwood stage had shut herself in the room to which the obsequious landlord had conducted her.

There was now a peculiar glitter in her eyes, which were animated and dark, and the lamp-light seemed to give her a beauty she had not before possessed.

"I guess I am ahead of the hounds!" she exclaimed, turning from the mirror in which she had taken a hasty survey of herself. "It is something to get ahead of a tracker like Captain Claude Coldgrip. I know the man and his methods well enough to baffle him when he thinks he has everything secure. I am almost certain that he who has surrounded himself with wealth in Deadwood is the person I am here to help. There cannot be another like him; therefore I am not mistaken. A little rest here, and then for my great move against the New York ferret, who expects to play in the wild Northwest a winning game."

Colonel Eagle's guest had removed her hat and loosened a wealth of black hair, which streamed over her shapely shoulders, giving her a dashing appearance which proclaimed her a more than ordinary woman.

"What will he say when he comes and finds the game up?" she laughed. "Will he see my hand in it, and curse the hour he let me slip through his fingers when he could have held me with a little exertion? I told you I would get even, Captain Claude. The night I stood on the piers of New York and saw you walk away with your well-won prey, I swore to bring your next venture to naught if I had to follow you around the world to accomplish my ends. I am here for that purpose now. I know that the gold syndicate formed in Broadway have started you out on the trail of a mine said to exist somewhere among these Hills. You were not loth to go, either. No, Captain Coldgrip. Not very long ago you lost a certain trail, or, rather an imperative case forced you away from it for the present. You saw your opportunity when the syndicate called you to its aid. Don't I know that you think to bring down two birds with one arrow? We will see whether you do or not,

captain. Yes, I am here for that purpose—the woman whom you left robbed and desperate one year ago by the river whose waters wash the crime-stained docks of Gotham. And I am ahead of you! Ah! that is excellent. You are not yet in Deadwood, nor is your shadow Sunshine Sam here. Ahead of the hounds? Tomorrow—ay, to-night yet, perhaps—Leon Talbot will learn that he must be on the alert."

Thus to herself talked the person who had become Colonel Eagle's guest.

Her victory heightened her color; it sent her warm blood leaping through her veins.

She had won in the race for Deadwood! That was satisfaction.

But hardly had the last word found utterance ere a footstep on the bare floor beyond the door caught her ear and she turned with a slight start that checked her flow of congratulation.

"It is the landlord, coming up on an errand," she murmured fixing her eyes on the door while she waited for the knob to turn, or for the customary rap.

The next moment a slight noise engaged her attention.

The knob turned and the door opened.

A cry broke from the woman's throat, for she had caught sight of the man at the threshold, and it was not Colonel Phoenix Eagle of the Gold Brick!

She went back three paces before she could get even partial control of her nerves. Her look was a stare of undisguised bewilderment.

The man, who was shapely in physique and good looking, took off his hat as he advanced.

"Ah! good-night, Lucia," said he. "Have you been feasting yourself on the idea that you were ahead of the hounds?"

There was no reply.

More brilliant than ever blazed the black eyes of the Gold Brick's quest.

She saw nothing but the man before her, and in her look there was hate undying.

"I thought so!" she suddenly exclaimed, and she took a step toward her visitor who was eying her steadily. "I thought I was ahead of you, Captain Coldgrip; but your presence here indicates that I had deceived myself. However, sir," and her figure was drawn proudly back although she did not move out of her tracks. "You have not yet found your quarry, nor reached the portals of the lost bonanza."

She did not know the person whom she addressed had entered the hotel as Benjamin Byrd. To her he had but one name and title—Captain Coldgrip, the Neverfailing Sleuth of New York.

"I have not found the Lost Angel, Lucia," he answered, with a quiet smile. "And if you can prevent, I presume the quest will prove very disastrous to me."

"Right you are, Captain Claude!" cried the woman. "What did I tell you a year ago thousands of miles from here? You heard me utter my oath on the wharves of New York, under the stars and above the river. I fancy you laughed derisively then, for I saw contempt in your eyes—contempt for the woman you had hunted down. The oath taken then I repeat now. You have found me here and you shall listen."

"Go on."

"Let the Recording Angel record in his book the renewed oath of Lucia the Outcast!" cried the woman, elevating her right hand above her head. "I sacredly swear again to baffle the gold kings of Gotham, and to bring to a fatal ending the trail of the paid ferret—the man who made me what I am. He has discovered me where he hopes to reap reward. I know what he seeks; but while Lucia lives he shall not clutch the prize. I hate without stint Claude Coldgrip, the human hound of Broadway and the hand I hold aloft in the sight of Heaven to-night shall be against him forever. I am here to warn to assist and to destroy!"

"Is that all?" asked the detective, coolly, as the uplifted hand dropped at the woman's side.

"No, it is not all. Action comes next," was the swift reply. "I shall fight you in any way I can, and with whatever weapons that fall to my hand. If you are here your spy, Sunshine Sam, must be near. I have no more love for the man than I have for the master!"

She stopped and looked at him.

"I don't waste words, Lucia; you know that," and the New York sleuth leaned toward the woman closely watching him. "I am here to win, and win I shall if a thousand Lucias are on hand to baffle me!"

It was the first boast she had heard fall from Captain Coldgrip's tongue, and when he drew back she plainly saw that he meant every word he had spoken.

CHAPTER VI.

THE SLEUTH AT WORK.

"Go! go and succeed if you can, Coldgrip!" The detective did not hear these words, for he had left the room occupied by Lucia, and she stood in the middle of the floor with a pair of white hands tightly clinched, and eyes full of rage fixed on the door.

"I did not expect to meet her here, but since she has come, I must put up with her. Her boast that she is in Deadwood to warn, to help,

and to destroy she may recall under thrilling circumstances in the future. Go ahead, Lucia, my New York queen. If you show your teeth like a tigress, you may feel the Coldgrip hand when you least expect it!"

Captain Coldgrip did not encounter Colonel Eagle as he passed from the house. He had left Lucia to herself with his last words ringing in her ears, and she could either carry out her plans or give them up—just as she liked.

It was not probable that she would pursue the latter course. The woman whom he had met in New York had not come to Deadwood for mere pastime. He knew she was there for a purpose, and her thrilling oath told him that he had one enemy among the Hills who would keep him back from the portals of the Lost Angel Mine if it were in her power.

Once more on the streets of Deadwood, the Atlantic spotter sent a look back toward the hotel.

He thought he saw the watchful eyes of Lucia at one of the upper windows, but he kept on after a single look.

"Sam is not back yet," the detective remarked when, a few minutes later, he had entered a house not very far from the Gold Brick.

He did not know what the reader has already witnessed.

At that moment Sunshine Sam, his right bower, was far from Deadwood with an escort of silent men whose hands rested on the butts of cocked revolvers.

"A man, sir," announced a youth, not more than seventeen, as he poked his head into the room occupied by the spotter.

"I'll see him."

The head vanished, there was silence for a moment, and Captain Coldgrip was confronted by a lithe figure whose left hand was busily engaged in twisting the ends of a jaunty mustache as black as its owner's eyes.

"Oho!" parted the detective's lips when he saw his caller. "Come forward, Jacinto."

The slim man obeyed, and Captain Claude continued as he dropped into a chair around a corner of the table which held a lamp.

"You have something to say."

A grin was the reply.

"They are inquiring about you," Jacinto Jack said, with a nervous look across the room as if some hand beyond had turned the knob on the door.

"Who is doing this, Jacinto?"

"Who do you think would do it? Can't you guess?"

Captain Coldgrip appeared to reflect a little while.

"Was it the Deadwood nabob?" he asked.

"By Jove! the bull's-eye the first shot!" exclaimed the Black Hills dandy.

"Did he ask you?"

"He did."

"When?"

"To-night."

"At his house?"

"No; in one of his mines."

"Ha! why didn't he hold his inquisition at home?"

"I did not know at first, but I do now."

"Well?"

"He had a caller at the time, and he probably did not want her to hear anything."

"Who was this caller, Jacinto?"

"Mad Blake Barton's daughter."

The last information was somewhat surprising, but the Atlantic sleuth did not admit it.

"When did Coralie come back?" he asked, quietly.

"Since sundown, I think."

"Alone?"

"I cannot say."

"And she went to Colonel Cupid's?" murmured Captain Claude, but without addressing himself to Jacinto Jack. "It is not so strange after all. The Deadwood nabob has worked his cards well with the prospector, but he has not been able to get a grip on the bonanza secret."

Then he went at the mustachioed sport again.

"You went to the mine with Talbot, Jack?"

he inquired.

"I did."

"What happened there?"

"He wanted to know if I knew you."

"Interested, eh?" smiled the Broadway shadow.

"You would have thought so if you could have seen his eagerness. I told him I knew you."

"After that—"

"He wanted to know when and where. I didn't go the whole length for him—not quite that far, captain. I told him you had been in Deadwood, but that you were not here now."

"A little prevarication of yours, Jacinto."

"Not so after all. I really did not know you were in the city."

"Which does not mean, I trust, that you would have answered all his questions if you had known the truth."

"Great Scott! no!" cried Jacinto Jack, starting visibly, for the eyes of Captain Coldgrip were regarding him. "My opinion is that Colonel Cupid wants to stock the cards by a piece of strategy; but maybe you don't want my opinion. But hang it! it is out now. Let

"er go," and Jack fell back in the chair and turned his attention to the mustache once more.

"Are you and the bonanza king on good terms?" suddenly asked the detective.

"Not intimate. He uses me whenever he can just like he does other people. He used me to-night, you see."

"Have you been to his house?"

"Heavens, no!" and Jack laughed. "He seldom carries his acquaintanceship that far."

"Not with you at least."

"The Old Harry take him! no. He goes further with some folks, though."

"Who are they?"

"In the first place there is the Deadwood Centaur."

"Yes."

"And Shasta Sam, the pard who turns up here about once a month and when he comes the faro banks have a boom which drops like a rocket when he goes."

"Has Talbot any other favorites?"

"I don't know whether we ought to catalogue the old man with Sam and Deadwood Duke or not."

"The old man who, when he comes, remains cooped up in Talbot's house?"

"Yes."

"Let him go. Now, you think you have named all who have the *entree* to the young gold-bug's house?"

Jacinto Jack became reflective.

"I've got them all, Captain Claude," he answered, with positiveness.

"Three men. Have you ever seen Shasta Sam play?"

"Fifty times."

"What is his luck?"

"Sometimes he wins. He does not seem to care whether fortune smiles or not, and he does not know the value of money. From the way he risks his gold, one would think he had a bonanza somewhere in the mountains."

"When was he here last? You say he makes monthly visits to Deadwood?"

"Sometimes he is behind a day or so. He was here the night of the tenth of last month. I happen to be able to fix the date by an occurrence which is of no interest to any person but myself."

"This is the seventh, Jacinto. According to your story, Shasta Sam ought to come back inside of four days."

"I think so."

"Now let me go a little further."

"Forge ahead."

Again Jacinto Jack threw one of his nervous glances toward the door.

The Deadwood dandy seemed to have a fear that somebody was just beyond the panels.

"Give me a description of Shasta Sam," continued the detective. "If he has any peculiarity, name it."

"Well," said Jacinto Jack, "Sam is six feet, every inch of it, in his stockings. Nature outdid herself when she molded him. His skin is rather dark, he has black eyes, over one of which the lid drops a little, caused, I have heard, by a red-skin's knife in a hand-to-hand fight in the Bitter Root country. He wears his hair long; sometimes he comes here with it in curls. His great peculiarity is that he can use one hand just as well as he can the other."

"Ambidextrous, eh?"

"That's the scientific name for it, I guess," resumed Jacinto Jack. "He dresses as it suits him. Sometimes he comes in priggish up like a Mexican dandy; then he turns up with rags on his back; but all the time that one eyelid keeps him Shasta Sam. There's your man, captain, as well as I can paint him with words."

"You haven't sketched a poor portrait, Jacinto," smiled the sleuth. "I think I should recognize Shasta Sam on sight. You need not describe the Deadwood Centaur, for him I have seen. The old man—"

"I never got a square look at him!" exclaimed the Black Hills sport. "He comes in between the days, as if he and the sun are at sword's points. Anything else, captain?"

"No."

As Jacinto Jack got up, a third look crossed the room.

"I ask something for this information," he went on.

The detective's answer was a look, but no words.

"When they get me I want you to take possession of the little I've got at the house. Will you do this, captain?"

"What do you mean, man?" exclaimed the detective. "When who get you?"

"This Dakota nabob and his men."

"Pshaw, Jack. You must not line your coffin before the tree has grown!" laughed Captain Claude. "Nobody is going to get the best of a shrewd fellow like you. Here, when you go back to Fortune's Folly, drink confusion to all your enemies," and Coldgrip tossed a gold-piece toward Jack, and by chance it dropped plump into his pocket.

Half an hour later a man on horseback moved down the main street of Deadwood.

On either side lights told where the children of fortune were contending over velveted tables

and rough pine boards for the gold they had wrenched from the hills.

It was Deadwood's night on, and the population was taking advantage of it.

The horseman rode on until he passed the last cabin, going south.

The mountain capital was at his back. Before him lay the wonderful country into which men of every description were flocking in the race for wealth.

All at once his horse started back.

The rider leaned forward and looked at the object which had frightened his steed.

A human figure lay in the trail at the horse's feet.

The next minute the saddle was deserted, and then followed a wild cry from the man's lips.

"Great God! it is Jacinto Jack!"

CHAPTER VII.

AHEAD OF TIME.

If the dandy of Deadwood had met his fate so swiftly, it was plain that his frequent glances at the door while being pumped by Captain Coldgrip were not inspired by a groundless fear.

"They found him soon," murmured the man who stooped over the body lying at full length in the trail. "I wonder if he was trying to quit Deadwood when they caught him? At any rate, he will never tell me for he is dead enough."

Yes, Jacinto Jack was dead, and the hand whose occupation was to curl the black mustache was already cold.

The man who had found the body was the person we saw last with him—the Broadway spotter, and the man who had come from the far off Atlantic Coast to give rest to a wild drama among the Black Hills.

Suddenly Captain Claude discovered something on the dead man's breast, and a closer examination proved it to be a piece of paper which had been pinned to the coat.

In a moment it was in the detective's possession, and seeing that it contained some writing, he got up and tried to make it out with the assistance of the crescent hanging like a silver bow in the heavens.

"Ho! the hand that struck Jacinto down has left a warning!" exclaimed the sleuth, for he had read the inscription on the paper which was briefly as follows:

"Thus dies the traitor!—
And all his kin!"

Captain Coldgrip allowed a smile of defiance to wreath his lips when he looked up from his warning.

"It is the first stroke," he observed. "I see that the gold-bug of Deadwood is determined to keep his way clear at all hazards. This is a specimen of his work. So far as Jacinto Jack is concerned it has been effectual. A traitor was he? Well, he did talk for me, and I picked up several points which may be of service to me hereafter. I am sorry, though, that Jacinto had to feel the dagger because he gave me a little information. He expected it, for I remember that he made me promise to take possession of his effects after death. What has he that would help me along? Jack was a dandy—nothing else, and a pauper dandy at that."

A short time later the New York detective returned the warning to the dead man's coat, and finding on the body nothing that interested him, he went back to the saddle.

His horse, urged forward, stepped carefully over the corpse and again Captain Coldgrip was riding on with Deadwood at his back.

"I'm not going to quit you, Colonel Cupid," ejaculated the sleuth as his thoughts returned to the most prominent personage in the gold hills town. "Don't think for a moment that the dagger wielded so well to-night has frightened me from the trail. You were very anxious to find out something concerning me from the dead man back there, and you are likely to have your desires gratified. The witch of Gotham will probably deliver some startling information before I get back. You are not expecting her, Talbot. I fancy she has a genuine surprise in store for you. Look out for the woman with the star eyes. You must not attempt to dally with the new love before you have surely put aside the old."

At this juncture the steed felt the spur, and a moment afterward Captain Claude was being carried swiftly down the road which was now fringed with mountain rock and shrubbery.

Let us leave him on his journey and go back to Deadwood, but ere we return we promise the reader that the American Vidocq will soon be heard from in a manner most exciting.

It was near midnight when Captain Claude rode from the Black Hills city and found Jacinto Jack dead in the trail.

Deadwood had a sleepless eye.

From dark to dawn certain places never closed their doors, and there were rooms where the jingle of money mingled with the coarse voices of men at all hours.

Fortune's Folly—Jacinto Jack's favorite resort—was one of these all-night lairs.

It was a degree removed above its neighbors in respectability, but for all this, it had had its tragedy like the other dens of Deadwood.

Into this place a short time before the finding

of the dandy on the trail glided a man who instantly received more than the usual attention.

He was almost gigantic in stature, and under the brim of the big soft hat he wore the lid of one eye drooped peculiarly.

"Shasta Sam is back from his secret bonanza," passed among the men who saw the man come forward. "Now, we will see some dandy bets over the table."

The welcome extended by the person who presided over the bar of Fortune's Folly to the man who had come was of the most cordial nature.

He evidently knew the meaning of the visit, and, then, Shasta Sam's appearance indicated that he had come to Deadwood flush.

A hasty drink at the bar followed the big sport's entrance, and then he passed into the little room beyond with several curious and delighted loungers at his heels. As we have heard Jacinto Jack tell Captain Coldgrip, when Shasta Sam came to Deadwood the faro banks had a boom.

He found a place at one of the tables, and with no explanations concerning his month's absence, plunged into the game.

His first bet was successful, and those who looked on took it as an omen that fortune was going to give Shasta Sam a lucky night.

Without a word he played, while now and then the curse that follows misfortune rung on his right hand and on his left.

The eye sparkling under the wounded lid saw every card, and his swarthy hand took quick possession of his winnings, or turned over his losses when he was unfortunate.

Suddenly he looked across the table and caught the dealer's eye.

For ten minutes he had lost uninterruptedly. Fortune had turned.

"You'll coax her back, Shasta," the dealer said with a gambler's smile in response to the giant sport's look. "The goddess is coquetting with you for a spell."

There was no answer; the eyes of Shasta Sam went back to the cards, and again he gave up his bet with a coolness which never left him.

Again and again!

The spectators who had followed him in from the bar exchanged significant glances, but said nothing.

At last Sam got up.

His air told all that he had lost all he intended to lose at present.

"One of my bad nights, gentlemen," he remarked with a smile to the players at the table, and then before he could be answered, he wheeled and walked toward the bar.

As he crossed the step separating the two rooms, the front door opened, and a boy sprung into the place.

Fright, strangely mingled with discovery, was visible on the youth's face, and he had barely entered the room ere he shouted:

"Murder!"

The bartender looked over the bottle he was just placing on the counter, and frowned on the boy.

"See here, Daisy. We don't 'low kids hyer—" "Can't help it, but I thought you'd like to know that Jacinto Jack has passed in his chips through a bowie's slip, an'—"

"What's that? Jacinto Jack, hey? Whar?"

"Just out o' town, on the south trail."

"Dead?"

"Dead as a mummy!"

"Oh, you're giving us taffy, Daisy George," replied the bartender.

The boy grew indignant.

"Mebbe I lie!" he cried, striding toward the counter, with his eyes fastened on the long-necked black bottle, which would be an excellent thing to launch at the barkeeper's head. "When you are in Jacinto's condition, Custer Charley, you won't be sellin' nose-paint over the bar o' Fortune's Folly."

"Give the boy a chance," said Shasta Sam, and then he caught the little fellow's eye. "Tell me about Jacinto," he went on. "Dead, you say?"

"Yes, sir. I saw 'im lyin' at full length on the trail. There was a paper pinned on his coat, but I didn't stop ter read it. It was Jacinto, an' no mistake." And the speaker looked at the man among the bottles, to see whether he would again dispute his word.

"If Jacinto is dead, I'll have him brought in," the bartender responded. "I don't know that he ever harmed anybody, and we kin git up for him a funeral that'll stir Deadwood ag'in' the assassin."

"Mebbe you'd better go a little slow," whispered Shasta Sam, leaning on the counter while his lips moved. "You don't know who you might stir up."

"Well, there'll be no harm in fetchin' in the corpse, I hope?" replied Custer Charley, losing a good deal of rising indignation under Sam's look.

"Not at all," answered the big sport. "Jacinto is entitled to a decent plant. But I would remark, Custer, that we can't afford to meddle with affairs not our own."

The following moment Shasta Sam was moving toward the door, his broad shoulders a mark for the bartender's eyes, and not until he had

passed out was there another word spoken in the place.

"Why didn't you fetch in the paper you saw on Jacinto's breast?" cried Custer Charley turning his attention to the boy.

"I don't want to get into trouble. The hand what finished Jacinto didn't lose all its power when it struck. You kin tear off the paper if you want to, Custer; but not for Daisy George, if you please!"

"What did you think of Shasta Sam's remarks?" and the barkeeper lowered his voice. "You heard him?"

"I haven't any opinion," replied the boy with a grin.

"I've lived in Deadwood long enough, Custer Charley, to know that opinions ar' dangerous hyer."

"Didn't you think—"

"I never think. I only know that I found Jacinto dead on the south trail. Jupiter! I wish I hadn't found him."

"We'll see at the inquest just what you know."

Daisy George drew back with a start.

"You want to go slow. That's what Shasta said an' I say the same!" he cried, with flushed face and suddenly flashing eyes. "Mebbe I won't know a blamed thing at an inquest. Who war Jacinto, anyhow?—one o' yer counter ornaments Custer? Fetch him in if you must, but you dor't want to drag me before the coroner. I'll go out and kick myself for playing fool already." And Daisy George, a boy known all over Deadwood, reached the door in a bound and disappeared.

Meantime Shasta Sam had left the vicinity of Fortune's Folly.

Several minutes later he appeared suddenly to a man who was examining some papers on a table under a swinging lamp.

"They've discovered him," remarked the big sport.

His voice seemed to send a thrill through the man at work, for he fell back and looked up into the giant's face.

"When—did—you—come—in?" he exclaimed. Sam smiled.

"When, colonel? In time to hear that Jacinto has felt your hand," was the reply.

"So he has! You are three days ahead of time, Shasta; but, by heavens! I am glad. I need you just now!"

CHAPTER VIII.

DARK DECEIT.

Of course the man who replied to Shasta Sam was the young nabob of Deadwood, Leon Talbot.

"Yes," he proceeded, quickly. "I want you the worst kind, Sam."

"What is up?"

"Something serious."

"You have not let somebody else get Blake Barton's bonanza secret?"

"I think not, but it is in danger—in deadly peril—all the same. Did you find Jacinto Jack as you came in?"

"No."

"Who did find him?"

"Daisy George."

"Oh, yes, the kid. We had to do something, and that promptly, my friend. Jacinto knew a little too much, and his tongue was hard to bridle. I struck one of my swift blows. The work was well done," added Colonel Cupid, with a smile of satisfaction. "There was no balk in the play, and one troublesome fellow has been silenced. Now—"

A bell over Talbot's head sent its silvery tinkle through the room and broke the sentence forming on his lips.

"Somebody at the door, colonel," observed Sam.

"At this hour?" exclaimed Talbot. "I have no appointment; I expect no report."

Speaking thus, he left his chair and advanced across the room.

Shasta Sam retired behind a curtain that hung at one of the corners.

The next moment Colonel Cupid opened the door and then—

He fell back with an audible exclamation of surprise, and looked at the person who had stepped forward.

A woman stood before him, a woman past five-and-twenty, with a figure which was grace itse, and a face lovely though dark of skin.

Her eyes lit up with sudden light as they fell upon the Croesus of Deadwood, and her step forward was airy and full of eagerness.

"Ah! I have found you, Leon," she cried, putting forth her hands, while Talbot confronted her like a man bewildered by the unexpected confrontation. "I heard long ago of the millionaire of Deadwood, but I did not know you were he."

By this time Talbot had recovered, and seemed to have planned his campaign.

He instantly became pleasant.

"Why didn't you come before this, Lucia?" he asked, with a hasty glance toward the tapestry which he knew concealed the burly figure of Shasta Sam.

"Ah! you did not want me, perhaps. They say you have struck it rich here," and the

beautiful speaker took in the room with a sweeping glance. "Fortune has not been coy with you, Leon."

"We haven't been on bad terms once since I came here."

"That is good. But aren't you afraid she may desert you, and suddenly, too?"

Lucia was silent for a moment.

"I am come," she suddenly went on, "to warn you again."

"Again?" echoed Talbot.

"Yes. You have not forgotten the warning I breathed thousands of miles from here?"

"No."

The answer sounded like a confession wrung from the man who spoke it.

"Leon, the old trail dog is still on the scent," Lucia continued. "He left my presence a short time ago."

"The old trail dog, you say?"

"Captain Claude, the man who never fails to find the quarry."

"Oho!" cried Talbot, and then he burst into a derisive laugh as he leaned back in the chair he occupied in front of his visitor. "Have you crossed the mountains to give me this bit of news?"

The woman had to look at the man twice before she could believe that he was not trifling.

Her lips met firmly before she spoke again.

"A bit of news! Is that all it is, Leon?" she exclaimed. "I would infer from your manner of expression that you don't fear this human sleuth who has left New York for the purpose of solving two mysteries in the wild Northwest."

"Two mysteries?" echoed Talbot.

"Yes. The Gold Syndicate of Gotham has sent him out to find the key to the famous Lost Angel bonanza, and he wants to solve the puzzle connected with a certain affair which I need not mention here."

"You have seen this man-hunter you tell me?"

"Not two hours ago."

"Where was he?"

"He came to my room at the Gold Brick."

"Ah! you have quarters in Deadwood?"

"Yes. I put up at Colonel Eagle's hotel for a slight rest before seeking you. Leon, you have not changed much," Lucia went on before the Deadwood nabob could speak. "I am glad to see that time has dealt lightly with you. You deserve it," and her eyes glistened. "We can live well in the free West when we have brushed the sleuth-hounds aside. They made life a burden for us in the city, but here—here, I say, Leon, we can find weapons that will crush them all. I told him I would warn his prey; I proclaimed my intention of fighting him to the bitter end. He did not look for me here. No, Leon; he thought I had passed out of existence in the roar and rush of Gotham long, long ago."

How the eyes snapped that looked into Talbot's face, and how Lucia's cheeks glowed while she talked.

Colonel Cupid saw it all, and wondered how a man could free himself from the spell of her unnatural beauty.

"Yes, the West gives one powerful weapons," he answered, with another glance toward the drapery in the corner. "But I did not need your warning, Lucia. I knew the man was here."

"Then you are prepared for him."

"Would I sit here calmly if I knew of his presence and yet was unprepared to grapple with him?"

"I think not."

"He is not the infallible sleuth he is said to be," Talbot went on. "The laurels he has plucked by the Atlantic are liable to wither among our mountains. I know this man Captain Coldgrip. He is cool, cunning, indefatigable and no coward. He gave you an example of his powers once. Ah! I see by your color, Lucia, that you have not forgotten it."

"When I do, may the doors of paradise be shut against me!" cried Lucia. "That man has been the bane of my life. He hunted me once to the edge of the river, and then let me slip through his fingers—I know not why. At the same time he was on your track, but why need I recall this past? Shall we not fight him once more, Leon? If he wins, the nabob of Deadwood loses all his possessions, and strangers will grasp the mines which yield their thousands to increase his wealth."

Talbot moved uneasily in his chair.

Why had this woman come upon the ground at this time?

What fate was it which had guided to him the dark-eyed beauty with whom he had been connected in the metropolis on the eastern seaboard?

"I would not have him turn on you, Lucia," he said, in well-feigned tones of solicitude. "Let me meet him. I have men and means at my command. I have but to touch a button within reach of my hand while I sit here to summon to my side the best trailers in the Black Hills. He may be a good sleuth, but I have his match in more than one man who is my faithful servitor. Lucia, let me clear the field without endangering you. When it has been done—"

when I can say that Captain Coldgrip has reached the end of his last trail, you shall share in the triumph we will celebrate."

"Whither would you have me go?" anxiously inquired the woman. "You would not send me back to New York, Leon?"

"No. Captain Coldgrip might find you there if he should go back before the game is played through. I can give you a safe escort to Denver."

"By the trails?"

"By the trails, Lucia."

"I would remain," she answered quickly. "I want to prove to this human sleuth that a woman's arm is capable of avenging her. I did not come hither to be sent from the field before the battle has begun."

"It has opened!" exclaimed Talbot. "There are several things you know nothing of, Lucia. You will go to Denver?"

Colonel Cupid appeared very anxious, and he seemed to lean forward while he waited for the woman's reply.

"When must I depart?"

"To-morrow; I want you to get a night's rest."

"But the escort?"

"I will select it."

"It will be efficient?"

"Never fear. You will reach Denver, Lucia."

"I will go, but remember—for your sake!" And Lucia stood over the Deadwood millionaire and laid one hand on his shoulder while she looked down into his face with an expression which had but one meaning—that of intense passion.

"A thousand thanks. Your decision has armed me anew!" exclaimed Talbot. "Go back to the Gold Brick and wait for the escort."

He held out his hand as he stood erect, and gave Lucia the benefit of his victorious eyes.

"Shall we meet no more before I go?" she asked in a voice of disappointment.

"I fear not," was the response. "My hands will be full of work to-morrow. The trap that is to catch the New York sleuth has to be properly set and baited. Nothing must go amiss, Lucia. This man is no dwarf, and I must not forget for a single moment that he has crossed a continent to make the nabob of Deadwood a pauper."

"If you forget it you are lost!" exclaimed Lucia, and then she took the hand he extended.

"Good-by."

Colonel Cupid let her hold his hand till they reached the door. Her intense eyes seemed to devour him.

A sigh of relief escaped him when he bounded back and clutched the tapestry in the corner.

Shasta Sam stepped forth.

"You heard all, Sam?" cried Colonel Cupid.

"How could I help it? I saw her, too."

"In heaven's name, why did she come to Deadwood?"

"Fate, I guess, colonel; fate, I guess."

"But she is to go away to-morrow. You heard me tell her? And you heard her consent, too?"

Shasta Sam bowed.

"Well, old fellow, the escort I send her will consist of one man. Take any horse you wish."

"I?"

"You! No refusal, sir. I will trust her in no other hands. She starts for Denver to-morrow; but she is not to get there! You will treat this as a command."

CHAPTER IX.

THE DEVIL'S BASIN.

MORNING had come again.

A few miles south of Deadwood, where the scenery was of the wildest description imaginable, for it was in the heart of the gold-ribbed hills, the first streaks of dawn were vanquishing night.

Along a rough trail, the ironed hoofs of their steeds striking fire on the rocks, rode eight muscular men whose faces were tanned and bearded. They were headed toward Deadwood, and as they came on they laughed and joked, or now and then broke out in snatches of wild song.

The horses were like the men, capable of enduring any amount of fatigue. They carried no unnecessary equipments, and bore their athletic riders with ease.

Down the trail, with the morning at their backs, rode the tawny eight.

Not very far away, although some distance above the riders, a single horseman was watching them with no small degree of interest.

He had the broadening light full in his face and it was so strong that he was compelled to shade his eyes with his hands in order to give the band the attention it seemed to deserve.

"There are eight of them," the watcher said in audible voice to himself. "If I mistake not, I saw some of those men in Deadwood and not later than yesterday at that. That big fellow in front I certainly saw, and the third one behind him, thanks to the excellent condition of my eyes this morning."

Nearer and nearer came the mounted eight. If they had looked up they would not have seen the person so closely watching them, for the unevenness of the ground between them and the spy.

The morning winds carried their boisterous merriment up to the solitary horseman, and now and then his keen dark eyes got a strange glitter while he looked and listened.

"I wonder how he crossed the colonel?" suddenly asked one of the eight—a man with a red scar over one eye.

"It isn't our business to ask, Scarbrow, you know," replied the leader. "We carry out orders with out questions. That's what we're in Deadwood for."

"Sartainly," returned the inquisitive rider, a little piqued at the reply. "Of course Colonel Cupid's wishes ar' law ter us, an' I guess I'm one o' them what obeys 'em ter ther letter; but, by George! I'd like ter know why we had ter serve that fellar the trick we did, an' I don't care who's aware of it, either."

For a moment or so there was no response.

"Boys," suddenly exclaimed the man at the head of the band, and as he spoke he turned half-way around in his saddle and looked into the faces of those following at his horse's tail. "I say, boys, did you remark how coolly he took the whole play?"

"We couldn't help it," answered Scarbrow. "I don't think he belonged to ther wild West, but, by Jupiter! he war clear grit an' no mistake. When we let 'im down I happened ter catch his eye, an' if thar warn't a twinkle in it, shoot me for a Sioux shawan."

"Grit he was, and I'll go no further than ter say that the colonel knew just what war best when he issued the orders we have just obeyed."

None of this conversation reached the ears of the man on the elevated trail, but he could see from the movements of the horsemen, as well as from the apparent silence they were keeping, that they were discussing something of interest to themselves.

After awhile another laugh, the result of some loud joke probably, came up to him from below, and then the little cavalcade passed out of sight, and was seen no more.

"Go back to your master!" exclaimed the watcher, waving his hand toward the mounted group. "Something is in the wind when you eight slaves of Leon Talbot ride together through the mountains. Have you been looking for Blake Barton and the secret of the Lost Angel Mine, or do you know something about my old help, Sunshine Sam?"

So the man alone among the Hills was Captain Coldgrip, whom we saw last riding from Deadwood after his discovery of Jacinto Jack's corpse on the south trail.

Ten minutes after the disappearance of the eight mounted toughs, he was on the trail they had taken, but he was moving in a direction directly opposite to theirs. In other words, he was back-tracking the nabob's gang.

The day grew stronger as he rode along, and by and by the sun peeped over the hill-fringed horizon of the East.

He had it full in his face.

"The whole set halted here," the detective suddenly cried, noticing a number of horseshoe impressions in the dust at his own steed's feet. "They must have consulted at this spot, probably fixed up a report of some kind for the mine king of Deadwood— Ha! I see. They came out of this side-trail here. Here is where they struck the Custer City road. Those fellows have been up to mischief."

He turned his horse into the narrow path at his left hand, and in a little while was riding over a trail hardly ample enough to accommodate two steeds abreast.

All at once Captain Coldgrip reined in his horse.

The animal's eyes were full of excitement, and his pointed ears were erect.

"What is it?" asked the sleuth while he listened. "It sounded like a human voice, but the wind among the clefts in the rocks overhead may have produced the noise! Make good use of your ears, horse. You know these hills better than I do."

The fresh morning winds seemed to fall at this moment, and no longer played with the clefts in the mountain rock like a harper with his strings.

"There, once more! That was not the wind. Ha! my Deadwood angels, you have not completed your work if that work was the carrying out of the young nabob's commands."

Again the horse moved forward.

All at once the wild trail made a curve, but, instead of following it, Captain Claude halted and then dropped to the ground.

"They came out of the bushes here," he remarked. "If I am not mistaken, the sunken land is near this spot."

Grasping the bridle he plunged forward, the horse following like a well-trained animal, and a minute later both had vanished.

In a short time, and after passing through a lot of mountain shrubbery, he came upon an almost barren table-land, which terminated at the brink of a precipice.

Beyond the cliff, the landscape or that portion of it which received the detective's attention was sunken, as if some convulsion of nature had tried to destroy it.

The basin was surrounded by tremendous walls almost perpendicular. In some places

they seemed to be wholly so, and as they were hundreds of feet in height, they presented a spectacle of wonderful sublimity.

Captain Coldgrip knew that he stood on the rim of the Devil's Basin.

It was several miles in circumference, and within its walls grew not a single plant or tree to relieve the monotony of its desert-like aspect.

If the Deadwood riders had come to this dreary place it had been with a purpose, and the trail which Captain Claude had followed told they had come thither.

On the almost grassless edge of the Basin, the marks of hoofs were plainly discernible. They went to the east around the rim, which was nearly a true circle, and the Broadway sleuth, still leading his horse, followed like a tireless hound.

Fur several hundred yards he pursued this journey.

The trail led him on and on as if intended to force him to pass around the Basin.

"Here they halted!" he exclaimed at length. "The trail does not proceed beyond this spot."

Captain Claude dropped the bridle and advanced to the ledge.

Far beneath his station lay the bottom of the wild Basin, covered with masses of stone broken, as it seemed, by the hammers of Titan convicts during an age beyond the memory of man.

All at once a sound came up to the detective's ears.

"Again? I was not deceived," cried he dropping to the ground, and then leaning over the ledge, one of his hands half buried in a crack in the ground at his right.

The next second Captain Coldgrip was looking down the wall below his position. His eyes were keen and bent on discovery.

"My God!" burst suddenly from the sleuth's lips. "The demons of Deadwood were riding back from some fiendish business sure enough!"

Some fifty feet beneath the Atlantic ferret and in mid-air hung an object which he knew at once was the body of a man!

The unfortunate individual was not suspended by the neck like a gallows bird, but was incased in a net work of ropes like a prisoner of the Dark Ages in his iron cage.

From the captive's head a rope ascended to a jagged rock which protruded from the wall, and which enabled him to swing free of the side of the Basin.

Captain Claude could but marvel at the ingenuity and daring that had placed the victim in this terrible position.

A wind that swept the rocky walls at that time swayed the imprisoned man back and forth, but he was as helpless in his rope cage as a bound criminal in an iron cell.

The New York detective watched the prisoner for some minutes. The perilous situation fascinated him in an unaccountable manner.

Who was that unfortunate being below?

"The cowards wouldn't give me a chance, curse them!" cried the man in the basket.

"I'm in the tightest place of my life. They know that the vultures won't be long discovering me, and they expect the wolves of the sky to finish their work in the Devil's Basin. What's the use o' trying my lungs any more? I've shouted till I'm hoarse and my tongue seems to have a hundred cracks. But I'll give it another trial." And a prolonged cry for help came floating up to the breathless detective bending over the ledge.

It seemed to pierce his very soul, for he threw one hand to his mouth and sent an answering shout back to the doomed man.

"Courage! courage! I am here!" he cried.

CHAPTER X.

THE DROP OF A LASSO.

ALTHOUGH the man in the basket was completely secured by the ropes, he nevertheless managed to twist his neck sufficiently to let him look up for the purpose of ascertaining from whence the answering shout had come.

Then it was that Captain Coldgrip fully recognized the prisoner in the net.

It was his pard, Sunshine Sam!

"I'm in a tight box, Captain Claude," exclaimed the spotter's best man, and his words were supplemented by a laugh which echoed around the sides of the Devil's Basin. "They didn't give me a chance to play rat, the varmints! and I can't move a muscle without pain. Besides, the loop above me seems to be slipping from the projecting stone. You know what that means."

"If that is the case, don't exert yourself one particle," responded the Atlantic sleuth. "I have found you, thank fortune, and I intend to get you out of the Basin."

"You'll have Sunshine Sam's eternal gratitude if you do," came up from below. "I've been hanging here in torture ever since the hounds went away. When I get out o' the basket, let the double four look out."

Captain Claude proceeded at once to the task of rescuing his comrade from his terrible situation.

How was it to be done?

Sunshine Sam hung twenty feet below the rock to which the rope had been fastened. Be-

tween the projection and the top of the wall there was a space of thirty feet. It was somewhat rough, and here and there at irregular intervals were clefts apparently large enough to admit a human hand.

Captain Coldgrip noticed this before he drew back from the wall and returned to his horse.

From the saddle he took the Western horseman's indispensable companion, a stout lasso of unusual length, and uncoiled it as he walked back to the ledge.

The nearest tree grew some distance from the fringe of the wall, but the detective encircled it with the lasso, and found that he still had enough to reach the man dangling in mid air over the bottom of the Devil's Basin.

Down fell the rope, lengthening as it descended, and when it was straight, the loop at one end hung below the doomed spy.

The next minute the breathless occupant of the basket saw the detective swing his body over the cliff, and then, with dilated eyes, he watched him come down by means of the lasso and the clefts and wild bird retreats in the wall.

"That man is worth his weight in diamonds!" muttered Sam, while he eyed the daring detective now in mid-air with nothing between him and the rocks hundreds of feet below but a rope no thicker than his finger. "He's doing it all for me, and he could get along without me, too. Won't I pay him back for all this when I get a chance? You kin bet your life I will!"

At length Captain Coldgrip stood on the projecting rock and leaned against the wall for breath.

The first half of the ticklish task had been accomplished; the worst was to come.

Sunshine Sam said nothing while he surveyed the figure of the New York sleuth on the narrow rock which had not room for two men at once.

He was afraid that his voice would unnerve the man who needed all his coolness then if it was ever needed in his life.

After awhile Captain Claude drew up the lasso and enlarged the loop.

He now sat outside the rock with the coolness of a sailor on a spar.

"Try to bend forward!" he spoke to Sunshine Sam. "Steady, steady!"

The man in the basket obeyed.

By steady exertion he found that he could throw a part of his body beyond the line of the rope which stretched above his head.

"There!"

"Then Coldgrip, gripping the noosed lariat, leaned well forward, his eyes fixed on his suspended pard.

All at once a dark object like a falling serpent left his hands, and darted toward Sunshine Sam with wonderful precision.

A bullet from the rifle of a champion shot could not have gone straighter to the mark.

The noose dropped over the prisoner's head, and settling below his shoulders, was drawn taut with admirable skill.

"Where did you learn to shoot a lasso?" exclaimed Sam, giving the man on the rock a look of delight.

A smile came down from above.

"I had to hit you," accompanied the smile.

"Now, Sam, we will open the second act."

The Atlantic ferret got up and grasped the lasso hanging loose between the captive and the top of the wall.

Then he began to ascend, hand over hand, but with the agility of one used to suck work.

How Sunshine Sam watched him!

"What if some devil comes and cuts the lasso?" suddenly thought he, and the thought sent a chill through his blood. "But nobody will do that, for the eight devils are back in Deadwood by this time, laughing in their sleeves at me hanging in air for the vultures of Devil's Basin. When the birds get me they'll know it—by Jove! ha! ha!"

The ascent was as successful as the drop had been, and the sleuth drew himself over the edge of the wall and stood erect on solid ground.

"We're a team yet, Sam and I!" he exclaimed proudly as his eyes got a triumphant flash. "The fellow I picked up in New York and transformed into a spy has helped me more than once, and I stand by him through thick and thin."

He went to his horse which he led to the tree where he had secured one end of the lasso which he loosened and proceeded to make fast to the animal in a manner that would admit of a steady pull.

Then confident that matters below the cliff were as he had left them, he took the bridle-rein and spoke gently to the steed.

The horse moved forward steadily, the rope tightened, and then glided over the top of the wall.

"Steady, steady!" he said to the horse. "You're pulling a brave pard out of the jaws of death," and the animal, seeming to understand, kept on without swerving an inch from a straight line.

Once or twice Captain Coldgrip looked over his shoulder, and his eye seemed to measure the length of lasso that had come up from below.

"Here I am! One more pull, Captain Claude!" suddenly rung out a voice, and a mo-

ment afterward an object like a ball came up over the cliff and was dragged forward.

In an instant the detective stopped the steed and bounded toward the man on the ground.

A knife-blade flashed in the beams of the morning sun, and then, with a cry which he could not suppress, Sunshine Sam dashed his ropes aside and sprung up.

The rescue had not failed, and he was not to fall a prey to the vultures of the Dakota wild lands!

He leaned against the detective's horse while he told his story to an auditor who let him have his own way.

"When they nabbed me in Deadwood just after I had left Coralie's house, I knew I was in for some devilish torture," finished Sam. "I could see by their eyes, which war about all of their faces I could see, that they had something terrible in store for me. Great Scott! I did not think of the Devil's Basin, though I've heard of it fifty times since coming to Dakota. Captain Claude, I guess I won't forget this trick when I get a chance to pay the double four back."

"How did they remove the lasso which lowered you over the wall?" asked the detective. "You say that a man stood on the rock and adjusted the short rope over the point. But the lasso that let you down? They had to loosen it to complete their work."

"They shot it off!" answered Sunshine Sam. "It was the best piece o' shooting I have ever witnessed. They threw a fire-ball past me, and by its light, the captain of the eight shot the rope in two."

The detective smiled.

"Do you know how near the short rope was to the point of the rock when I dropped the noose?" he asked.

Sam shook his head.

"It was a scant four inches," was Captain Claude's rejoinder.

"I'll live to make them the dearest four inches the eight Dakota rascals ever knew!" ground Sunshine Sam through clenched teeth. "You say you saw them riding back through daylight, captain? To me they were masked, but you shall pick them out for me when the time comes."

"I'll gladly do it, Sunshine. Now we will turn our attention to Blake Barton, the prospector. The men who surprised him were not the same who kidnapped you."

"They could not have been, Colonel Cupid and his pards are not the only persons who are seeking the doors of the Lost Angel Mine. I had to laugh when the eight searched me, expecting to find something valuable on my person. Fools! they found nothing to make the eyes of the Deadwood nabob sparkle. Captain Claude, what do you think of the prospector's chances?"

"The men who captured him will play some desperate cards for the secret."

"So will the millionaire who turned his tigers loose on me."

"He knows that I have come to Deadwood, for by his orders, if not by his own hand, Jacinto Jack died in the trail. Then, Lucia will confirm his previous discoveries."

"Lucia the New York tigress who hates you for another man's work."

"Yes. She wonders yet why I let her slip through my fingers when she expected to be handed over to the law," answered the detective, with a faint smile. "Now she proclaims herself my sworn enemy, and says openly that she will warn Leon Talbot and assist him in any manner against us."

"She is cool and dangerous," said Sam.

"She would be more dangerous if she could keep her head at all times and under all circumstances," was the ferret's response. "New York Lucia will not get on as she expects with the man she has hunted up in Dakota. Wait and see, Sam. You spoke with authority when you told Coralie Barton that I would try to find her father. We cannot find the true trail to the lost bonanza until we have found the prospector. Our diagrams are not as complete as his. He has the true one, and the only such in existence. For it Colonel Cupid has played more than one sly hand, but he found a counterfoil in Blake Barton. You can see the new phase the fight takes on from this moment."

"I see it all," answered Sunshine Sam. "It isn't a stone wall by any means. The odds are against us. Where are our allies, Captain Claude?"

The detective joined in with the light laugh that followed Sam's words.

"Look! on one side Leon Talbot with men and millions at his command, New York Lucia, with her hate and cunning, and the gold desperadoes who caught Blake Barton in his camp; on the other side you and I—Captain Claude and Sunshine Sam! Not an ally, captain."

"Yes, one," spoke the detective.

"One?" echoed Sam, astonished.

"One—Coralie!" was the reply.

CHAPTER XI.

HOUNDS ON THE TRAIL.

BACK in Deadwood, not many miles from the scene of the opportune rescue in the Devil's Basin, Leon Talbot was listening to the narra-

tive of a large man who wore the ends of his pantaloons in boots which reached almost to his knees.

The nabob of the Black Hills was leaning back in an arm-chair, with an expression of satisfaction on his face.

The story delighted him.

"There can be no escape, Xerxes?" he asked, when the Dakotan paused and did not resume.

"Escape, colonel?" was the echo, accompanied by a look of wonder. "Why, he is as good as dead by this time. We don't mince matters, you know—not in your service at least."

"Don't think I doubted, Xerxes. I would not be treating you fairly if I did. Of course you did your work well, and ere this, perhaps the meddler has felt the talons of the vultures of the Basin."

"Right you are, colonel—before this. Any further orders?"

"Yes."

Leon Talbot put down the cigar from which he had sent smoke-rings to the ceiling during the report of his swarthy lieutenant.

"Blake Barton has fallen into the hands of a lot of men who want to unlock the gates of the Lost Angel."

The nabob's listener gave a slight start.

"When did this happen?"

"Several nights ago. I cannot give the exact date owing to some confusion on my informant's part. Those men wore masks, and pounced upon the prospector and his daughter like a troop of eagles."

"And netted both, eh?"

"No; they gave Coralie her liberty, and she is my authority for the information I have been able to impart."

"The devil take the mountain cut-throats?" growled Captain Xerxes. "If they got Barton they obtained the diagram he is said to carry on his person."

"If he did not baffle them," smiled Talbot. "The prospector has method in his madness, and if I do not mistake him he is a match in shrewdness for the eagles who caught him unawares. Now, Xerxes, I have this for you to do: I want Barton rescued."

There was no answer.

The big man recrossed his legs and ran dark fingers through his well-oiled hair.

"You will take the boys," continued Talbot. "I trust to your sagacity to strike the trail. Coralie, unfortunately, can give us no clew by which we can locate the point where the capture was made. The men were stalwart, and the masks they wore reached to their chins. Coralie could tell no more."

Xerxes encountered Talbot's look at the end of the sentence.

"Where is the Centaur?" he ventured.

"Abroad on a mission akin to yours," was the reply. "I sent him to the mountains after Barton a little while before Coralie came in with her startling story."

The man in high boots glanced at a calendar on the wall behind Colonel Cupid's chair.

"It is not time for Shasta Sam to be in Deadwood," he remarked.

"No. This is but the eighth. The tenth rounds out his month, you know."

Talbot did not see fit to inform his trusted lieutenant that Shasta Sam had come back ahead of time and that he had given him a commission as important as the rescuing of the prospector from the clutches of the masks.

"You don't need much rest," resumed Talbot.

"No. Our last trip was not tiresome. It is not far to the Basin."

"Then, get off as soon as possible. If you rescue Barton you will be careful to impress on his mind my agency in the matter. I am the person who saved him from the mountain banditti—I, Colonel Cupid, his friend. You understand, Xerxes?"

"I understand. If Blake Barton is living, and the black masks are not going to kill the goose of the golden egg, he shall come back to Deadwood with us. You can have my hand on this, colonel."

"Your word is enough."

"We will go at once. In your opinion, in what part of the country did the mine-hunter fall into the hands of the enemy?"

Colonel Cupid took a map from a drawer in the table before him, and pointed to a red circle some hand had traced in a certain quarter.

"It is mere speculation," he observed, looking up at the man bending forward. "From all I have been able to gather from Coralie, and that is very vague, I have imagined that the capture took place within this circle."

"The upper rim touches the Devil's Basin."

"So it does. I had not noticed it before," smiled the Deadwood Croesus. "Do not go on my theory unless you find something to sustain it. I have only been amusing myself. Bring Blake Barton back, and you and your fellows will be in a condition to stagger the faro banks of Deadwood."

Xerxes touched his hat like a man who knew the full meaning of words like these, and the next minute he tramped loftily from the room leaving Colonel Cupid alone and in good humor.

Scarcely had he gone ere a door at Talbot's back was flung open and a man larger still than Xerxes came into the apartment.

Leon Talbot turned, looked once at the man and got a cloud on his brow.

"I thought—" he began severely, but stopped suddenly, as if the look of his visitor had silenced him.

"I'm going in a few moments," said the man. "I was about to get her when I heard a bit of news which I felt it my duty to impart."

"What is it?"

"Coralie has left Deadwood."

There was a start on the part of the Black Hills millionaire.

"When did this occur?"

"A little while ago."

"Did she go alone?"

"Yes, but thirty minutes later the young doctor left the city."

"He did eh?" cried Talbot flushing. "I thought—Barton himself told me—But never mind. Is this your news, Shasta?"

"Yes."

"You might have kept it back," replied Talbot, the frown still on his brows. "You have a duty to perform. Lucia, the woman who was here last night, wants escort to Denver."

"I have not forgotten, colonel."

"You will carry out my wishes in full."

Shasta Sam dropped his head, but through his dark lashes he saw the man before him.

"Must this be done?" he asked.

"It must."

"Then the woman is positively dangerous?"

Colonel Cupid caught his lip behind his mustache.

"Why these inquiries?" he exclaimed. "Are you preparing to let the black eyes of the tigress catch you?"

"I'm no boy!" laughed the big sport. "Long ago I past the danger mark. I've had my day with the Cleopatras of the West. Do I look like a man capable of being caught in the net of a woman's weaving?"

"You do not, Shasta."

"Thanks. You call this woman dangerous, which implies that you know her."

"I do, and curse the day of our meeting. But to Denver, or, to the trail, she is willing to go. You will come back alone, Captain Shasta. The rest is understood."

There was a half-military salute, and the Deadwood giant went out the door.

"He didn't like to hear about Coralie going back to the mountains in search of her father, but he would not let on," exclaimed Shasta Sam, as his stalwart figure appeared on the street once more. "I know Leon well enough to see when he is nettled. He was between two fires. He would like to send me after the girl, but he cannot afford to recall his former commands. If I did not know the nabob of Deadwood thoroughly, I would say that some of his irons would burn. What! black eyes unnerve my hand, when I have orders from him? Shasta Sam has not gone back to his teens!"

A few minutes later a well-clad man, large of frame and handsome, in almost new apparel, rode up to the front door of the Gold Brick Hotel.

He led a horse furnished with a lady's saddle, and well-groomed.

When he drew rein the figure of a woman appeared in the doorway, followed by the pompous little proprietor, and within the next two minutes New York Lucia was seated beside Shasta Sam, ready for conduct over the mountains to Denver.

Already the sun had climbed the loftiest pathways of the hills, and his beams penetrated to every part of Deadwood.

A few people who happened to be in the vicinity of Phoenix Eagle's hostelry saw Shasta Sam and his companion turn from the place and ride slowly down the street.

They wondered who Lucia was, and when she came to town, and at the same time they envied Sam his situation, without knowing anything about the mission he was on.

As the couple rode past the doors of Fortune's Folly, Sam glanced toward the sidewalk, and his eyes remained fastened on the saloon for a moment.

He knew that the corpse of Jacinto Jack had been brought in from the trail by his friend, the proprietor of the Folly, and that at that moment it lay in an upper room awaiting burial in the mountain graveyard, whose tenants, for the most part, had died "in their boots."

The couple passed out of Deadwood with but little conversation between them.

Shasta Sam led the way.

To him the trail winding through the wilderness like a serpent was like a road as straight as the flight of an arrow.

"If she grows suspicious I will have trouble," thought the Deadwood giant, stealing a glance at the woman who rode at his side. "I don't intend to spoil her face, nor mar the beauty of her black eyes which are the prettiest I've seen for many a day. Between Deadwood and Denver somewhar—that's the command. Why couldn't she have kept away? Hang it all! did she have to come here to take this fatal ride?"

The sun touched the meridian and began to descend the trail of the western sky.

The tall pines threw their long shadows over the two riders still moving south.

Longer and longer grew these somber tints, until at length there was no line dividing the day from night.

For some time Shasta Sam had covertly watched Lucia with the eye of the hawk. He had allowed his horse to fall a neck behind, and he carried one hand dangerously near his belt.

"Pshaw! I don't have to shed a drop of blood!" suddenly he muttered. "There's another and a better way," and then he bent forward with his hand half open and ready for a spring.

At that juncture Lucia turned on her saddle and confronted him. Their eyes met.

"What was your mother's name, Captain Shasta?" she asked.

The giant tough recoiled and nearly lost his seat.

CHAPTER XII.

ON THE DENVER TRAIL.

It was a strange question, strange for the time and place, and Shasta Sam who had been startled by it wondered what could have put it into Lucia's head.

It had come in the nick of time, too—for the woman.

In another instant the clutching hand of the Black Hills sport would have been at her throat, and then—well, she would have realized that she had warned a serpent.

"What do you know about her—my mother?" asked Shasta Sam while he stared at Lucia who could not help smiling at the sudden fright she had given him.

"Nothing, Captain Shasta, nothing," was the answer. "Names form the hobby that has bothered me from girlhood. Whenever I see a man I wonder what his mother's name was, and very often my curiosity gets the best of me and I become inquisitive. You will pardon me, I trust?"

Was that all?

Shasta Sam could not help biting his lip over the singular outcome of it all.

He could not attack Lucia now. With her brilliant eyes fastened on him, and her voice full of strange sweetness ringing pleasingly in his ears, he had not the nerve to carry out at that time the commands of his master.

"Another time," muttered Sam to himself. "I'm not going to let her bamboozle me with pretty looks and queer questions. I've brought her from Deadwood for a purpose, and by Jupiter! I don't go back on Colonel Cupid! That isn't Shasta Sam o' Dakota."

The horses were neck and neck again, moving slowly over the trail crossed everywhere by the shadows of night, and in some places almost Stygian in shade. Lucia, silent from Deadwood, had grown vivacious, and her genial humor snapped continually, much to the booted sport's disgust.

He found himself wondering, at length, whether she was not talking against time. Perhaps she had detected the first movements of the intended attack. If so, would she not attempt a diversion which would baffle him entirely?

Shasta Sam replied to Lucia only when civility forced him to do so.

He had not forgotten Talbot's chaffing about the thrall of the black eyes, and he was resolved that the pair so near him should not play a dangerous game.

For all this Shasta Sam felt his purpose weaken more than once, and at each succeeding time he found it harder to get back to it than before.

"Hang it all! why did he send me with this creature?" he mentally exclaimed. "He might have waited till the Centaur came in; but no, he had to single me out for the job. I wish the whole scheme was in Tartarus, boil me if I don't!"

Shasta Sam was in no enviable position, and Lucia's flow of talk was making matters worse for him.

Suddenly she leaned across the space that separated them, and then he felt the touch of light fingers on his arm.

What was coming now?

"How rich is Colonel Cupid?" asked Lucia.

"I cannot say."

"How many mines does he own?"

"Nine."

"And wants another?"

"Mebbe so."

"Why doesn't he get it?" and Shasta Sam thought he detected a provoking smile on the woman's face.

"We can't always get what we want just when we want it, you know," replied the sport.

"True, Captain Shasta. But hasn't your master, the colonel, been able to reach the keys to the Lost Angel bonanza?"

"Not yet," but Sam instantly brightened.

"He'll get thar yet, I tell you. I'd like to see the barrier that can hold him at bay very long."

"You have confidence in Leon Talbot?"

"I have, because I know him."

"Yet, Captain Sam, all of you have not been able to possess yourselves of the secret one half-

deranged man pretended to own."

Shasta Sam did not like the taunt.

"What do you mean, woman?" he asked.

"Do I speak in riddles? Why haven't you succeeded in outwitting Blake Barton, the mad prospector, as you call him?"

"We'll do it yet!"

Lucia laughed.

"Come, Shasta! confess that the mine-hunter is too cunning for you!" she continued, and then her merriment fell into a strange seriousness.

"Is his child—his daughter—beautiful?" fell from her tongue.

"Oh, Coralie you mean?"

"Yes, Coralie."

"Well, as I judge beauty, an' I'm no expert," said Sam, "the girl is a daisy."

"Young?"

"I should say nineteen."

"Dangerous, then," thought the woman in the saddle, and if Sam had been observant, he might have seen her hands clutch the bridle-rein.

"If Coralie of Deadwood is beautiful, who is her victim?" she suddenly asked aloud.

"A young doctor there."

"Insured!" laughed Lucia.

"That is what they say."

"Who is he?"

"A young fellow named Finch—a sample of 'Frisco brains."

It was evident that Shasta Sam had no good feeling toward Coralie Barton's lover.

"The girl has caught no one else?" Lucia went on, eagerness and anxiety mingled in the depths of her eyes.

"I guess not."

"Young Finch is the chosen suitor, then?"

"Yes."

The woman turned her head away as if to conceal the pleased expression that had come to her face.

The result of her inquisition in some manner strangely delighted her.

As she kept silent, Shasta Sam was not the person to disturb her; in fact, the Deadwood sport congratulated himself on the break-up of the conversation.

Now he could go back to the stern business before him.

New York Lucia's voice no longer stayed his arm, and her eyes had ceased to regard him with the look almost capable of disarming the most merciless.

Gradually Sam felt his old nerve coming back. Deadwood was far behind them, and the trail ahead was hardly discernible twenty yards beyond their steeds.

"If she opens her batteries on me again, I won't promise the colonel to do anything," reflected Sam. "I've got to work while the tide is in."

Once more he allowed his horse to drop back a little.

This time there was to be no failure to execute.

Shasta Sam had recovered that coolness and courage famous in more than one camp and mining-town in the Northwest.

He began to watch for an opportunity with the zest and cunning of a tiger.

"I'll wait till we get into the patch o' moonshine just ahead. I don't want to make any mistake," muttered the Deadwood demon. "I want to see what I'm jumpin' at, for there's a good deal in this play."

Not far in advance the trail opened a little, and where the trees were fewer a bit of moonlight revealed the ground.

Sam seemed to hold his breath while he bided his time.

"Hark!" rung suddenly from Lucia's lips, and Shasta Sam bending forward laid one hand on her steed's rein.

"I heard the noise. Some persons are ahead of us," said he. "We will go forward to the moonshine yonder and let 'em pass."

Lucia said nothing in reply, and then they rode on again and reined up a few feet from the trail where it was flecked with moonbeams.

Beyond the light where the shadows lay as thick as ever, the voices of men were heard.

Lucia looked at Shasta Sam and saw one hand resting near his belt. There was also animation in his eyes as if to wait in the dark for man was one of his favorite pastimes.

In a minute after the halt in the shadows, the head of a horse appeared in the moonlight, then another and another, and above each rose the wide-brimmed hat and striking face of a mountain outlaw.

Lucia counted them hurriedly as they crowded across the moonlit path.

There were nine.

All were stalwart and swarthy of skin. They wore their shirts open at the throat, and above their piercing eyes rested the cowboy hats, all of one shade, and alike in design.

On they came.

Shasta Sam and Lucia, with their motionless steeds, formed equestrian statues among the trees.

Neither seemed to breathe, and they saw only the mountain horsemen moving over the trail toward Deadwood.

In a minute they had passed, and Sam and Lucia lost sight of them when darkness reigned.

"Did you see him?" whispered the sport's companion, darting toward him while her band went out.

"See whom?"

"The man in the center of the gang. His legs were lashed to his horse, and there seemed to be cords at his wrists, although his hands held the lines. Ah! you must have seen the cut-throats' prisoner!"

Shasta Sam's look already betrayed him, and Lucia saw by it that he had seen the man who had claimed her attention during the passage of the horsemen.

"What of it?" exclaimed Sam, returning Lucia's glance with one of assumed indifference. "Don't you know that man is always hunting man in these parts?"

"And he hunts him sometimes in quarters more civilized than these, for that matter. But the prisoner of the men who just passed? You saw the ghostly face, the staring eyes, and the stamp of suffering on his face?"

"Well?"

"Isn't that man Blake Barton, the bonanza-hunter?"

Shasta Sam started.

"Do you think so, Lucia?" he asked with an amused smile.

"I have not said so. I merely asked you."

"Well, if he was the crazy prospector, what we have just witnessed shows that it is dangerous to have bonanza secrets, or to claim to have 'em, in the Black Hills."

"He has fallen into the hands of a lot of desperadoes."

"Every mother's son o' them ar' that!"

"They will torture the secret out of him, if they can't get it by any other means."

"You can bank on that."

"Then, I don't want to go to Denver," and once more the hand of Lucia fell upon the big Dakotan's arm.

"Why not?"

"We must rescue the mad prospector from the vultures of the mountains."

Shasta Sam could not but send the woman a look of amazement.

"It is not our mix, Lucia," he exclaimed. "Besides, what could we do against nine devils like those?"

"Never mind. You have two revolvers in your belt. Give me one. You have never seen me tried, Captain Sam."

"Not to-night," answered the rough, resolutely. "We move ahead again. Come!" and his hand closed at the bit of Lucia's steed as he avoided her gaze.

CHAPTER XIII.

A DEAD MAN'S SHOES.

DARKNESS was again falling around Deadwood.

Although twenty-four hours had barely followed the finding of Jacinto Jack's body on the trail, the dandy sport had been forgotten, and the occupants of Fortune's Folly did not refer to the man who had been carried to a lonely grave where the pines grew tall.

The proprietor of the faro ranch had taken possession of Jack's few effects which were found in an old chest in one corner of his cabin, and they were now stored in a room above the bar.

The self-appointed executor had not taken time to examine them. It was eight o'clock when a man entered Fortune's Folly and called its owner aside. There was nothing particularly striking about this person. A dark beard covered his face, and he had a good figure.

"I understand," he said, to the ranch proprietor, "that you have in your keeping the personal property of Jacinto Jack."

Custer Charley, the saloonist, gave the speaker a look of amazement.

"What if I have Jack's things?" he asked.

"I'm his executor because I guess I was the best friend he had in Deadwood and—"

"That's all right," remarked the stranger, not at all disturbed by the refusal implied in the answer. "You have the property have you not?"

"Yes," reluctantly.

"I would like to go through the effects."

"You? Why, I don't know you, sir. Pardon me, you haven't even told me your name, and I don't see any order in Jack's hand app'ntin' you administrator, or anything of the kind."

"I have no such orders."

"Then I'm sorry—"

"Wait till I'm through, Custer Charley. Do you believe that Jacinto Jack was killed for his money?"

"Heavens, no! His watch was on the corpse when they fetched it into town. It was murder for revenge, or for—"

"Or for what?"

"Or for the purpose of sealing his lips. That's what I believe, and thar ar' other people in Deadwood who think the same, though they don't blow any."

"Why don't you start an investigation?"

"I?" exclaimed the saloonist, seeming to recoil a pace. "Maybe it would be policy for me, situated as I am, to let Jacinto Jack sleep in his boots without raisin' any dust over the corpse."

The man with the dark beard smiled.

"You are a man of policy, I observe," said he. "You think Jacinto Jack was killed by some person or persons who were anxious to silence him; but you don't want retribution to overtake them. Yet you were Jack's friend."

"I want 'em to suffer for the crime. I want vengeance to come as speedily as possible. But, by George! I can't go too fast. Did you know Jack?"

"I did."

"And were his friend?"

"I think so."

"When did you come to Deadwood?"

"An hour ago."

Custer Charley looked at the man a moment longer, and then let one of his hands drop on his shoulder.

"I believe you!" he exclaimed. "If you were Jack's friend, you hate, as I do, the hand that showed him no mercy on the trail south."

"I hate that hand."

"Hounds of Hades! that is enough. You want to examine Jack's effects, you say? You shall, and to your heart's content. Step this way," and the proprietor of Fortune's Folly led the stranger to the long, low-ceiled room above the gambling-place and the bar.

"Yonder is all his property—in yon chest," he continued, pointing to the chest in one corner of the room. "I haven't even looked into the box. Take your time to it, and don't let any noise you may hear below drive you from your task."

The following minute a man was on his knees before the heavy and somewhat old-fashioned chest which contained all the effects of the dead, or at least all taken possession of by Custer Charley the saloonist.

On a table at his right hand stood a lamp, which lent him all the light he needed, and the Deadwooder's footsteps had barely ceased to sound ere he threw back the lid of the chest and began the examination.

There was in the eyes of the searcher a look of eagerness which the lamp revealed.

He had come to the place with the intention of looking into the murdered dandy's chest, and his success pleased him.

There were in the chest articles that seemed out of place in semi-civilized Deadwood—kid gloves, and cravats of all colors, with other toilet accessories. There were also several suits of clothes, for Jacinto Jack did not wear one suit long enough at a time to render it stale.

One by one the contents of the chest were taken out and piled carefully on the floor.

The searcher said nothing while he worked.

He was absorbed in his task.

At length the bottom of the chest was reached.

It was covered with a variety of cuff buttons, buckles, and other small paraphernalia belonging to a gentleman's wardrobe.

"Can it be that he would make me promise to take charge of his effects, and yet have no reason for doing so?" suddenly exclaimed the man. "Has anybody been ahead of me in this work of search? I was not here when Jacinto Jack was buried. Other hands may have been ahead of me. I will know presently."

He ran his fingers through the trash in the bottom of the chest.

In doing so they struck the wall at one end, and a hollow sound was emitted.

The man stopped short, then ducked his head, and rapped on the same spot again.

The result was the same sound as before.

A moment later, he was industriously going over the end of the dead man's chest in search of a way to the hollow which he knew existed behind the board.

He found it sooner than he anticipated, for all at once a portion of the wooden wall fell outward, and a square cavity was partially exposed.

"So Jack did not talk nonsense," was the ejaculation which followed the discovery, and the searcher's hand dived into the opening like a swallow into a chimney.

When he drew forth his hand again, he clutched a piece of paper folded long, yet narrow.

"By Jove! it looks important even if it amounts to nothing," he cried, rising and opening the document near the lamp.

"This is important!" parted his lips. "I think it puts a new weapon into my hands. I did not think to find it, though, in a dead man's chest."

For several minutes he read carefully the lines of the written document. At his feet lay the late contents of the dandy's trunk, and he stood between the lamp and the door with his shadow falling on the latter, casting it in black.

"That will do for one night," said the man, thrusting the paper into an inner pocket and then turning his attention to restoring the clothes to the chest. "They would give a good deal for Jacinto Jack's legacy and not a little to know that I am back in Deadwood."

When the chest had been repacked the stranger dropped upon a chair at the table and went over the paper with more care than he had taken with it before.

"I'd like to know where Jacinto got that

which he has here divulged. He seems to have kept it for me, though he did not know that I was coming after it. Now I know why he wanted me to take possession of his property after his death when he expected just what he got shortly afterward—a dagger by Leon Talbot's orders. Never mind, Jack. The day of retribution may not be far off for the man who sent you to the mountain cemetery because your tongue wagged a little too freely to suit him!"

A quiet smile was at the man's lips when he looked up.

At that moment the latch of the door across the room gave a click.

"Are you through?" asked a voice as a head appeared above the threshold.

"Just through, Custer," was the answer, and the searcher stepped forward, and confronted the rather nervous proprietor of the den.

"I said you might have all the time you wanted, you know? That's just what I meant when I said it, but I guess maybe you'd better get through as soon as you can."

"What is up?"

"I don't like the movements of two men down below."

"Who are they?"

"One is Shasta Sam, the sport who comes to Deadwood once a month—the other is the Centaur. The latter, sir, got in since sundown. They both belong to the Deadwood nabob—to Colonel Cupid."

Did the stranger's eyes glow with sudden fire, or was it all imagination on Custer Charley's part?

"Where are these men?" quietly asked the searcher of the dead man's chest.

"The Centaur war at the bar when I came up, and Shasta Sam isn't far away. That's a window. It leads out onto a back building with a nine foot roof. I guess you're six, and the drop won't be much."

"It is three feet more than I intend to take," was the quick answer most resolutely spoken.

"You don't want trouble, I hope?"

"No, sir; but I will not sneak from the men you have mentioned. I came up by this door. I will retire through the same."

The owner of Fortune's Folly gave the speaker a glance of astonishment.

It was not bravado, but the determination of a man of nerve.

The foot of the stairs lay at a door which opened into the bar-room. It was the only legitimate way out.

Before the saloonist could speak again the stranger opened the door and started down.

"These men may not be looking for me," he remarked, with a look at Custer Charley.

"Don't fool yourself. You are likely to run against them unawares."

There was no answer to this, for the man was half-way down the steps, and the faro-keeper, with a supplementary growl, resolved to let him take care of himself.

He turned promptly to the door when he reached the bottom of the stairs.

"Who in Satan's name is he?" exclaimed Custer Charley, and then he leaned forward to catch loud words, a command to halt, or even the report of the fatal six-shooter.

Ten seconds of suspense in silence followed.

Nothing!

Down the steps dashed the owner of Fortune's Folly, and his face was a shade lighter than usual when he threw open the door and stepped into the bar-room.

"Where is the Centaur?" he asked in whispers, leaning toward the young man behind the counter.

"He followed the man out who just came down-stairs."

"Merciful heavens!" gasped Custer Charley, and then he faced the street and listened.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE SCENT OF BLOOD.

"Who was that man?" suddenly asked the young clerk.

"I—I don't know," answered the owner of Fortune's Folly, without turning his head.

"Well, whoever he is, Deadwood Duke was waiting for him. His eyes fairly snapped when the man opened the door and walked into the bar."

"Yes, yes."

"I looked for a meeting right here, but the Centaur followed him out."

"With fight in his eye?"

"With the Old Harry there."

As yet not a sound had come from the street. Beyond the door of the establishment rested a mysterious silence that excited the Deadwood saloonist.

At length he moved forward and went out.

He had waited five minutes for pistol-shots, and the failure of any to salute his ear had perplexed him.

Perhaps a duel with knives had been fought outside, and, as such events were not uncommon ones in Deadwood, Custer Charley expected to see at least one human figure lying stark in the street.

But he saw nothing of the kind.

"It beats me!" exclaimed the faro-keeper.

"Deadwood Duke watches for a man, he follows him into the street with the stealth of the tiger, he comes from Colonel Cupid for this purpose, he has a chance to drop the spy, the enemy, or whoever the person is, but he does nothing of the sort. It's a puzzle to me."

Let us go back a span and see.

The Deadwood Centaur did not lose sight of the searcher of Jacinto Jack's chest when he stepped from Fortune's Folly into the street.

"Mebbe Custer Charley wasn't able to pierce his disguise, but I think he doesn't fool me," the Centaur murmured. "I came back in the nick of time to get onto this cool head who has come so far to play another of his famous games. I'm glad Shasta Sam isn't around just now. I want this job all to myself. I wonder what he was doing up in Charley's room? He was there alone some time. Laying the ropes, hey? He has to do all this alone now, for I understand the boys left his pard-spy in the Devil's Basin."

At this time the object of Deadwood Duke's espionage was walking away from the gambling-ranch.

Was he aware that a man with a velvet step was not far behind his heels? Why did he not wheel and confront Leon Talbot's lieutenant, who, since sundown, had returned to Deadwood from an unsuccessful mission among the hills?

Not far from Fortune's Folly the watched man turned abruptly into a dark space between two buildings.

"His horse is there," thought the Centaur, and then a footstep at his back caused him to wheel on the man who came up.

"Well, what have you found?" asked the person who joined Deadwood Duke.

"I've run the game down."

"Where is it?"

"Between the buildings yonder. A horse is there. Wait," and the two toughs, Shasta and Centaur, gripped their six-shooters and waited.

"Look! the horse!" suddenly whispered Duke, and they both saw the figure of a steed emerge from the darkness, and advance toward the southern environs of Deadwood. "Captain Coldgrip came back for something. He must have looked for it in the room above Fortune's Folly. What is there to attract any one?"

"Nothing, unless it be Jacinto Jack's wardrobe."

"What would that yield?"

"A lot of old sleeve-buttons, collars and the like," said Shasta with a chuckle. "He was in that room, eh?"

"He was."

"For how long?"

"About an hour."

"And you?"

"I was waiting for him at the bar."

"He is going away, as you see. The New York sleuth is going back to Blake Barton's trail, from which he expects to start for the hidden portals of Lost Angel Mine."

"We are not to let him go. You know the orders, Shasta?"

There was no reply, only Shasta Sam's fingers tightened at his revolver, and his eyes regarded the mounted man with a fiercer light.

"You've fooled with the trigger after night," continued Deadwood Duke, looking at his companion. "We'll never get a better chance."

"That is true."

The next second the right hand of Shasta Sam was raised, and he glanced over the barrel of a revolver that kept the star-beams awhile on its polished surface.

The Deadwood Centaur was prompt in following his example, and the man still in sight where the light streamed from the windows of some wild resorts, was covered by the deadly six shooters of the pards.

"Neither too high nor too low," whispered Sam. "We are shooting now for the biggest bonanza under the sun."

Suddenly the echoes of Deadwood were awakened by the reports of two revolvers blended into one, and little puffs of smoke floated before the sports.

"Whar's our man?" cried the Centaur.

"Yonder. Hanging from the horse like a dead man! Look! We made no mistake, Duke. See him yonder in front of Mountain Dew Ranch. Ah! the horse is frightened. He smells the blood of the New York ferret. By heavens! he is off!"

The clatter of hoofs sounded down the street, and the Deadwood pards saw a horse carry off before their eyes the man they had made a target of in the night.

"We must follow!" exclaimed Shasta Sam.

"The colonel's commands were that there should be no incomplete work. We must not go back to him until we know that Captain Coldgrip has reached the end of his play in Deadwood. The horse will take the south trail because it is the broadest. We must not be far behind."

Not long afterward two men rode down the street just traversed by the steed of the man supposed to be the New York spotter.

Shasta Sam and Deadwood Duke were on the hunt of their victim who, when last seen, was clinging to his steed like a man desperately wounded and ready to drop at any moment.

Of course they would find him dead some-

where on the trail, probably near the spot where Jacinto Jack had met his fate at unknown hands.

The hoofs of the pard's steeds stirred the dust as they advanced.

They got beyond the last cabin and began to exchange looks and expressions of astonishment.

"Is it possible?" cried Shasta Sam. "A man hit hard like he is get this far?"

The big sport reined up and slipped from the saddle, and the Deadwood Centaur saw him bending over the trail.

"He passed here," said Sam looking up.

"Then we go on."

A hundred yards further down the road the same operation was repeated, and a similar report made to the man who waited for it in the saddle.

"There is to be no turning back," Shasta observed with stern resolution. "This is one of the wounded wolves that must be finished. We can't ride back and report that Captain Claude is done for, just because at the crack of our droppers, he fell forward on his horse like a person dead. We dare not serve him this way. 'We go to the end, eh, Deadwood?'"

"To the end!" answered the Centaur, and the two Black Hills pards tightened their belts and kept on.

Every now and then Shasta Sam would dismount and inspect the trail.

The quarry was still ahead, and each halt told the train that they were on the right track.

It was a long pursuit, long because the hunters had the night against them; but this did not deter them in the least, nor dull their resolution.

"We are nearly there," Sam at last announced from the ground. "The horse has been walking here as if he were tired. You know what that means, Deadwood."

"He has lost his rider."

"Yes, he has shaken off the dead man, or his grip has become loosened and he has fallen off."

"That will be luck for us."

With renewed hope the men pressed on.

Another mile.

The horse ahead was still walking, but Shasta Sam had discovered that he made frequent halts.

The moon had come up since the opening of the exciting pursuit, and here and there, where the trail was open, the silvery light showered the ground.

"By the scepter of Jove! the horse has disappeared!" suddenly cried the giant Deadwooder.

The Centaur bent down and followed Sam's finger where it pointed at the trail at his feet.

"Gone! You don't mean it, Sam?"

"Get down and look. That's the last tracks. I know we've been following flesh and blood, but Captain Coldgrip's horse doesn't go on from this point."

Filled with curiosity and somewhat excited, Deadwood Duke dropped to the ground, and bent over the spot of moonlight where the imprints of the iron shoes stopped abruptly.

"What'd turn the animal aside here?" asked Sam.

"Mebbe he back-tracked."

The nabob's best man shook his head.

"We were to foller to the end, you know," admonished the Centaur with a smile under his mustache.

"And we will, if the trail leads beyond the blazing gates of Tartarus!" flashed Shasta Sam. "I don't want this New York sleuth-hound to escape with life in his body any more than Colonel Cupid does. If the horse turned back from here, he left the trail somewhar. Let me get my bearings. We passed the three pines a piece back, didn't we?"

"Yes; they're about half a mile behind us."

"Then we are not far from the Devil's Basin. The path switching off from the pines would likely attract a horse. We go back."

Once more the wild West pards were in the saddle, and the following minute were moving backward over the trail they had just covered.

"Foxes have eyes, but sometimes they see not, and the scent of the keenest reynard sometimes fails."

These words were not spoken in the tones of either of the men who were riding back toward Deadwood.

On the contrary, they fell from the tongue of a man who was barely thirty feet from the spot where Shasta Sam lost the hoof-prints in the road.

"Go back!" he went on, a light laugh of victory following the command. "As you have determined to follow the trail to the end, we shall meet again. The compliments bestowed to-night I can charge up to Leon Talbot, but I am not likely to forget the hands that delivered them. No, Shasta Sam and Deadwood Duke, Captain Claude will remember!"

CHAPTER XV.

THE SHADOW OF THE TRIGGER.

AT nearly the same moment that witnessed the commencement of Shasta Sam and the Dead-

wood Centaur's back trail, a certain scene was occurring not very far from the spot—a scene to which we deem it our duty to transport the reader.

It will be remembered that Shasta and New York Lucia had been compelled to move to one side of the Denver road for the purpose of avoiding a lot of mounted men who passed without discovering them.

These desperadoes had in their midst a man who was lashed to the animal he rode. He was also well watched by nine pairs of sharp eyes, and everything indicated that he was a very important prisoner.

At any rate he was of enough importance to be lashed to his steed beyond any possibility of escape.

Blake Barton, the mad prospector—we need not conceal the captive's identity—had fallen into the clutches of as desperate a set of men as could be found in a thorough search of the Northwest.

Their leader, a big ruffian named Xerxes, had organized the gang for the express purpose of finding the so-called Lost Angel bonanza, the secret chart of which Barton was thought to possess.

Of course the toughs were not expected to subject their prisoner to death while there remained any hopes of reaching the prize through him, but they were prepared to inflict the most inhuman tortures in order to gain their ends.

Barton's face already gave evidence of intense mental if not physical suffering. Since his capture, he had resolutely sealed his lips to the demands of the band, and nothing had sufficed to move him into a betrayal of himself.

This silence had only increased the bonanza villain's belief in the genuineness of Barton's secret, and Xerxes and his lawless fellows had sworn anew that the prospector should yield up his possessions.

It was, therefore, not far from the locality of the scene which concludes the preceding chapter, and near the very time of its occurrence that Barton found himself in the midst of the gold cabal.

There was on the face of each man from Xerxes down a settled expression of firmness and devilishness.

Barton reclined against the trunk of a pine, pale and fatigued. He was tied in a manner that prevented escape, but the cords permitted a repose of limb which he greatly needed.

The scenery round about was wildly grand.

The band had halted in a mountain hollow, and on every side rose tall pines and rugged rocks.

"I'm getting tired of this playing," exclaimed Xerxes to the group of men who surrounded him a few feet from the spot where the mad secret-holder lay, probably wondering what was to come next, or whether his daughter Coralie had gone back to Deadwood.

"We're all tired of it, cap'n," replied an outlaw, stealing a scowling glance at the man by the tree. "Let's settle with him one way or the other. He'll weaken when it comes to dead business, and he sees that we are showing our teeth."

An approval of this sentiment passed around the crowd.

"Come, then," responded Xerxes, and he moved off toward Barton with his companions at his heels.

The Deadwood prospector looked up and seemed to read their decision on their faces. He did not change expression, however, but waited calmly for the first move.

"Well, Barton, we're ready for the secret now," began Xerxes, halting in front of the prisoner. "We can't afford to play with you any longer, and we are prepared to get at it at any expense."

"I have answered you already," returned Barton, and his lips met firmly after the escape of the sentence.

"Come, don't play fool to the end," laughed the mountain robber chief. "We don't want to proceed to harshness, Barton."

"Proceed."

More than one oath was uttered at this at Xerxes's back.

"You have a daughter," resumed the bandit.

The man started.

"You want to see her again, and to do so you don't want to fight us through mere bravado. Stand him up, boys."

Several men lifted Barton and placed him on his feet with his back against the tree whose roots had formed his pillow.

"I will now impart some information which we kept back," Xerxes said, stepping near the man. "Coralie awaits you in Deadwood, and we will give you safe-conduct to her on certain conditions which cannot be strange to you."

There was no reply.

"When you left New York on hunt of the Lost Angel, you possessed what purported to be a chart of it and its surroundings."

"I did."

"You had that chart after you reached Deadwood from which place you directed your expedition."

"That is true."

"We believe that you can reproduce that

diagram from memory, even though you do not possess it just now. Is this not true also?"

All the roughs saw the smile that seemed to come unbidden to Barton's face.

"You have answered me," continued Xerxes. "Now you will give us that chart. Here is paper ample enough and a pencil, too. The diagram need not be on a large scale."

Blake Barton drew back from the materials extended by the dark hands of the outlaw chief. Xerxes's eyes flashed.

"Do you mean that you will not?" he cried.

"I have answered you all before this."

The rage of the road-robber leaped all bounds at once.

"By the fires of Hades! you don't know us, Blake Barton!" he exclaimed. "The face of the girl in Deadwood shall not plead successfully for the gold fool whom she calls father. Once more: Will you give us the bonanza secret?"

"I will not."

There was a strong disposition on the part of the men at the head bandit's back to rush upon the prisoner without ceremony, and nothing but a restraining look from Xerxes held them back.

"Hitherto we have touched you with the velvet of our paws, now feel the claws and teeth of the tiger!" roared Xerxes.

The man before him did not quail.

"If you think we will turn you loose to carry back to your child the secret you withhold, you are now to see the folly of that thought. The vulture band of the Black Hills took an oath long ago to let no man get to the lost bonanza if it could not. That oath is to be kept to the letter. We rule or we ruin."

At a certain gesture by the robber chief, two men advanced and seized Barton, one on each side.

"Ten paces out yonder!" commanded Xerxes, addressing the men, and the mad prospector was marched away.

Down upon this scene showered the bright moonlight, for the tops of the pines did not exclude it, as if they wanted the gold clan to carry out its infamous designs to the letter.

Barton was halted a short distance from where Xerxes and his six companions stood, and his conductors stepped aside, but kept a grip at each arm.

"Cover the prisoner!" spoke the outlaw chief, and his own hand and five others went up.

There was a cocked revolver in each clutch.

"Within three minutes, Blake Barton, you will be the dearest man within the compass of the Black Hills," Xerxes continued, looking mercilessly over the barrel of his revolver at the prisoner, whose insane resolution had met and baffled him at every step. "You will leave behind no avenger, and the grave of the secret-holder will never be moistened by the tears of the child orphaned by his stubbornness."

To this there was no audible response, nothing but the semblance of a sneer at the corners of the prisoner's mouth.

"Die as the fool dies!" cried Xerxes the outlaw. "I count five, gentlemen," and he glanced at his men. "We will go to the bonanza over the body of the insane man who put off finding it a little too long. Now, meet your fate like a hero if that kind of stuff is in you, Blake Barton."

A second of thrilling suspense followed and then Xerxes began to count.

"One—two—three—four—"

There was a pause.

It was the last chance for Barton to surrender his secret.

The fifth number trembled on the mountain villain's tongue, and he was ready to pronounce it in the same breath which had sounded the others.

All at once there fell on the ears of all a singular sound.

It was not the pronouncement of the last number, nor was it the mingled reports of the bandit's revolvers.

It came from behind the two men who were holding Barton up to the work of villainy, although their assistance was not needed.

A figure darted forward, and there was the flutter of drapery in the moonlight.

"Father! father!" exclaimed a voice, and as two arms encircled Barton's neck the glad sentence "found at last!" succeeded the cry.

Xerxes recoiling with a curse of keen chagrin, looked at the men who still held their revolvers on a level with Barton's breast now shielding by the palpitating heart of Coralie.

The men threw the look back to their chief.

The girl had come!

A singular fate it was that had guided her to her father, and in the nick of time, too.

She was wild, in her delight, and amid her demonstrations seemed to forget the circumstances under which she had found her sire.

A sudden light, and as strange as it was sudden, lit up the depths of the bandit captain's eyes.

The girl had been her father's companion before and during his residence among the Black Hills.

If she had been companion, why not confidante?

The mental inquiry sent a thrill through Xerxes.

"Thar's a glorious chance yet," he thought, and then he walked toward the pair, but with his gaze riveted on the girl alone.

Coralie did not hear the tread behind her.

"Well, you have found him, I see," said the harsh voice of Captain Xerxes.

The prospector's daughter loosened her arms and turned upon the outlaw.

"I have found him and in your clutches still!" she cried, drawing her graceful figure up in front of the robber and his band. "I understand the revolvers clutched in the hands of the men at your back. He refused to surrender his secret, did he?"

"Yes, like a fool! If he has shared it with you, girl, you can serve him well."

"In what way?" asked Coralie.

"We'll take it in exchange for his life."

"That is the offer of a conscienceless scoundrel!" cried the girl, and her hand covered the outlaw while she spoke. "My father's life for an act of treason, is it? I scorn the offer! He stands before you—Blake Barton, the possessor of the Lost Angel Mine secret. Once more he appears the target for your aim. Why don't you pronounce the numeral that trembled on your tongue awhile ago? There he is. Empty into his bosom the revolvers of your gang, and be pursued by a Nemesis who will slay without mercy until not one man is left!"

It was a striking picture.

Coralie Barton had stepped aside, and there was no barrier between the mad prospector and the six-shooters of the gang.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE DEVIL HELPS HIS OWN.

THE eyes of the heroine of Deadwood said fearlessly "If you dare," as plainly as though the words had fallen from her lips.

"This display of spirit won't help matters," Xerxes the bandit said in the silence that followed Coralie's reply. "We are men who cannot be frightened by threats. You share your father's secret—we know that now—and you must see that a surrender of it to us without reserve is the only act that can stay the hands of the gold league of Dakota."

"I surrender nothing! You shoot your prisoner at your peril, and though the avenging hand be but a woman's, those who feel it may wish it had never fallen."

"Enough!" cried Xerxes with an impatient gesture. "We waste no time from this moment on. Gentlemen, the target is before you."

Once more the revolvers of the bandits crept to a level with Blake Barton's breast.

The daughter's lips met firmly, and she watched the swarthy executioners with collected mien.

"One," said Xerxes.

A second of silence followed.

"Two—three—four—"

Coralie did not spring before her father and throw up her hands.

"Five!"

With the fatal word came a burst of sound that almost drove a shriek through the girl's welded lips.

The desperadoes of the mountains had fired at the command of their chief, and with a cry full of pain and death, the mad prospector staggered back and fell!

In an instant Coralie was on the spot, and the stern robbers of the hills saw her stoop over the quivering, breathing body.

"It is enough!" suddenly cried the girl, springing erect and facing the pistoled demons standing still in rank as when they had fired.

"Leave me alone with all that was dear to me. He would not have approved of enforced treachery on my part, and I would not betray. You vultures need not touch the body you have deprived of life. Let the future take vengeance for the devilish doings of to-night. Before the God of Heaven, I swear over the body of my father to take vengeance such as Justice will approve. Your work is done. Will you not leave me with the dead?"

Xerxes looked at the girl out of eyes that showed no gleam of pity.

"I never saw a woman yet whose blows took very deep vengeance," he exclaimed, and then he issued in low tones a command which sent his minions back.

If Coralie's attention had not all been given to her father, she might have seen the gold cabal march from the scene, and have heard them spring to saddle a short distance away.

"Wal, we failed in the end with him, cap'n," observed a man who rode alongside the bandit leader, silent and with lowered brows.

"Yes."

"We got an enemy by it, too."

"The girl do you mean, Cummings?" asked Xerxes.

"The girl."

"Do you fear her?" and Xerxes glanced from beneath his brows at the man.

"I don't like an oath o' the kind she took."

A look of contempt settled on the leader's face, and he turned from his companion with a shrug of the shoulders not hard to interpret.

By and by one of the horseman dropped out of the gang.

No one seemed to miss him, but Xerxes had seen him depart.

The man rode back toward the spot where the mountain gang had performed its crowning act of brutality.

He was anxious to see what had followed the oath of the young girl.

When he drew near the hollow, he dismounted and crept forward with as little noise as possible.

"By heavens! gone!" he exclaimed, halting among the trees at the edge of the glade, and exhibiting a startled face to the scene he looked upon.

The little hollow lately the scene of a most exciting incident was now untenanted.

After awhile the bandit spy advanced again and halted on the very spot where Barton the prospector had fallen before the ruffians' fire.

"The girl had help! she could not take the body away without assistance," he muttered. "If her help was here while she played her hand, it was too weak or too cowardly to give assistance."

For several minutes the Black Hills bandit searched the hollow, but found no traces of Coralie and her father.

Then he went back to his horse, remounted and rode away.

What had become of the mad prospector and his child?

If the man who had come back to the execution ground could have looked far down the shaded trail, he might have seen a young girl seated on a horse behind an inanimate body which lay across the steed.

Need we say it was Coralie Barton?

The head of the animal was turned toward Deadwood, and the white hand of the girl, stretched across the body, gripped the lines with undaunted resolution.

On, on rode Coralie.

Now and then she bent tenderly over the face partially upturned to her, and her lips murmured something which only the winds seemed to hear.

Let us follow her.

It was morning light again when the horse with his double burden struck the limits of Deadwood.

The girl avoided the main street of the town with its many eyes, and kept among the less frequented thoroughfares as she pursued her way to her home.

Strangely enough, she reached the house unperceived.

"We are home!" she said to the man across the saddle.

The brief sentence revived him, and drove his lips apart with an ejaculation of unfeigned thankfulness.

Coralie dismounted and called all her strength to her aid to help her father down. Supported by his child, Blake Barton, most desperately wounded and near death as it seemed, tottered into the house and dropped upon a sofa just beyond the door.

"Home! and with the secret safe yet, Coralie?" he cried, a smile overspreading his ghastly features.

"It is safe, but merciful heavens! see what it has cost us," was the answer.

"But I'm worth a dozen dead men for all—a dozen—dead—men—Coralie!"

The next moment the mad prospector had fallen back on the sofa, and Coralie darted toward him with a cry of horror.

"Frank!—Frank!" cried Barton wildly, pushing his daughter's hand aside.

Coralie started up.

"Can I quiet him?" she exclaimed. "He may be dead when I get back."

"Bring me Doctor Frank," gasped Barton. "I have one chance in a million, and I'm going to take it."

The girl departed.

"I don't know about this," suddenly continued the outlaws' victim. "The robbers accused Coralie of having the secret. I don't know where she got it—not from me, I am sure. If I am to die, she must possess it—my only legacy to the best of daughters. The other papers are safe. The diagram must be added to it."

It was a mighty effort which took Blake Barton from the sofa to the table that occupied the center of the little room.

"That which I carry in my head I can certainly transfer to paper," he went on. "I have it all before me now, and my hand will help me to the end. Courage and strength, Blake Barton. If you are not to reach the portals of the lost bonanza, your daughter shall."

He flung himself into a chair at the table and drew paper and pens toward him.

He looked like a man who was beating death back with the desperation of a giant.

His teeth were firm set, and his fingers clutched the pen with death-defying purpose.

There were no preliminaries, for there was no time for any.

Barton, the mine-hunter, went at once to the important task before him.

He got control of his nerves by a tremendous effort of will power, and in a minute he was drawing a rude diagram on the paper in front of him.

He was absorbed in the work.

He saw nothing but the moving pen and the work that grew where it ran; he heard no sounds at all.

If his ears had not been shut to all outside noises, he might have heard the door open behind him.

The portal admitted a man who slipped forward with a pair of eager eyes fixed on Barton and his work.

He tip-toed across the room, and looked over the shoulder of the map-maker.

How his color went at the sight he saw, and how his eyes gleamed while he looked!

Not a sign of his presence did he give the absorbed man at the table.

Like a tiger in ambush he bided his time, confident that he was not doing so in vain.

All at once a violent tremor ran through Barton's hand, and the pen fell from it and rolled away.

"Finished, anyhow!" cried the prospector. "Heaven, I thank thee that I have ready Coralie's legacy when she comes. Now for its deposit with the other documents. Then—I care not what comes after that."

He attempted to get up, but vainly.

The man behind the chair stepped back a pace, and watched him like a serpent.

"Great God!—is this—the end?" cried Barton. "I must hide the gold map. It is for Coralie's eyes—for hers alone! When she comes—"

He fell upon the table in his efforts to grasp the diagram he had made, then he came back with a sharp, darting cry, and fell from the chair in a swoon closely resembling death!

"Fortune favors me!" exclaimed the one witness to this, and quick as thought almost he sprang forward and caught up the map with eager hands.

"It is all there and it is worth millions!" he went on, and a moment later the diagram was safe in an inner pocket!

All this was the work of ten seconds.

The possessor of the bonanza diagram bent over Barton.

He had placed one hand at his pulse when the door across the room opened with a quick sound.

"Father, I am here!" cried a woman's voice, and then the speaker with a gasp stopped short and looked amazed at the man she confronted.

"When did you come?" she demanded.

"Just now. I found your father on the floor unconscious."

He tried to impress Coralie with a look that he spoke the truth, and he may have done so, for the girl had dropped to the floor and was kneeling at her father's side.

Suddenly she gave utterance to a cry of piercing pain.

"It is all over. Now let the takers of life be on their guard!" said she.

In a moment the man was beside her.

He kept his fingers at the prospectors' wrist for a few seconds.

There was no flutter of life under the white skin.

Blake Barton was dead!

"Say I wasn't born under a lucky star!" chuckled the man who walked from Coralie's home with the precious diagram in his bosom. "They don't often get ahead of Colonel Cupid, the nabob of Deadwood. The map I've been scheming for this long while is mine. I can now snap my fingers at Captain Coldgrip, the Yankee sleuth-hound!"

CHAPTER XVII.

THE LITTLE GAME OF HOODWINK.

CORALIE stood spellbound over the body of her father for several moments after the Deadwood nabob's departure.

He had told her before going away that, by the merest chance, he had heard rumors of her father's return badly wounded, hence his presence in the house on her return from her expedition in search of medical assistance.

Who had told him?

Coralie thought she had reached home unobserved although she was aware that there were sharp eyes in Deadwood.

Not one word about the fate of the gold secret had Colonel Cupid uttered.

He had offered, however, to help ferret out Xerxes and his mountain gang, but Coralie firmly rejected the proffer, saying that in time she would take vengeance herself.

Leon Talbot went straight to his house from the scene of his unexpected success.

The gold map schemed for so long was his at last. It had fallen into his possession fresh from the hands of a dying man, and the lips of Blake Barton would never part to tell Coralie that he had drawn the precious diagram for her.

The secret was his and his alone and Talbot had cause to congratulate himself over his wind-fall.

Every foot of the Black Hills apparently was known to him, and when he retired to his private apartments in his house he eagerly drew forth the map.

A second later a cry fell from his tongue.

"Can this be the true key to the secret?" he exclaimed, his eyes seeming to take fire from the

map spread out before them. "I do not need Shasta Sam nor the Centaur to hunt for me from this hour on. One *coup* has given me the victory. The Lost Angel Mine has dropped into my lap fully ripe, and I will not be slow to make use of the fruit."

Talbot locked the map up in a huge steel safe which stood in one corner of the room.

He had scarcely performed this service when the bell twinkled over his head.

It was the hour for certain reports from several of his mines, and to the young man who came to know his orders, he waved his hand with an impatient air.

"Who is it, Nolan?—Burke or Bradford?" he inquired.

"Neither, colonel."

"Stark from the Lower Ophir, then?"

"No."

"Name him out."

"It is a stranger."

Colonel Cupid appeared to start.

"What does he want?"

"I cannot say."

"See."

The youth retired and Talbot took up a cigar.

"He wants to see you, on business he says," said the voice of the young man at the door before the first puff had been taken.

"Send him in."

Talbot, the young Dakota nabob, leaned back and watched the door by which he knew his caller must enter the room.

Near where his left hand rested on the edge of the table, a drawer was open, and in it lay a silver-mounted six shooter, to grasp which he had but to drop his hand three inches.

Colonel Cupid took no chances.

His thousands—millions one might say—were coveted by more than one desperado, and he knew it.

He never sat at that little table without having the left hand drawer open several inches.

It was handy, you know, and then to have a revolver near in case of an emergency—that was better still.

The Deadwood Croesus soon heard the tread of the person he had told Nolan to admit.

Then the door opened and the two men were face to face.

Talbot's first look at the man was one of disappointment.

He had pictured him a different person from the one he really was—a well-built, rather tall man, with deep brown eyes, and a full beard of the same hue.

"Be seated," said Talbot. "I do not know to whom I am indebted for this early call."

"I am Mark Marigold, or, in camp phraseology, Marigold Mark," was the answer, sandwiched between two smiles. "I understand you purchase claims and mines when you see anything in them."

"I don't buy failures—that is a fact," and Colonel Cupid laughed. "Have you a claim to sell?"

"A sort o' one."

"Where is it?"

The man sitting just around the corner of the table, dived one hand into an inside pocket and produced a leathern pocket-book from which he abstracted a bit of paper.

Leon Talbot eyed him curiously.

"It's kind o' worn," Marigold said, unfolding the sheet upon the table under the nabob's eye. "Some o' the lines ar' hard ter make out, but what ar' obliterated I kin supply myself."

He pushed the document toward Talbot and then took a careless survey of the room.

Colonel Cupid bent over the table.

Was it the ancient appearance of the paper that attracted him, or had he caught sight of a curious combination of lines and angles?

At any rate Talbot started, whether his visitor noticed it or not.

He changed color.

"Is this the diagram of your claim?"

"Yes, colonel."

"Why, it is in the Hills!"

"It is."

"When did you locate it?"

"Oh, it was located long before I got that paper."

"I thought you called the claim yours."

"I did. I'm the sole owner at this time—Marigold Mark, who doesn't want to bother with a hole in the ground, but who prefers to go to the Shasta country with a little dust for a new venture."

Talbot looked the man over again before he spoke.

"Have you ever been to this claim?" he asked.

"Frequently."

"How far is it from here?"

"I'd rather close a bargain first," was the shrewd reply.

The Deadwood Vanderbilt saw that he was dealing with a man who knew just what he wanted.

"Would you conduct me to the claim if we make a trade?" Talbot went on.

"I'll do nothing less."

"Well, sir," and Colonel Cupid dropped back into his chair. "What do you want for your interest?"

It was a direct question.

"Five thousand dollars ar' whar I'd set my stakes," answered Marigold.

"Is the man mad?" mentally exclaimed the nabob of Deadwood. "Five thousand dollars for a guide to the Lost Angel Bonanza? What fate fetches this man to my house just after I have reached mad Barton's map? Does Mark Marigold know the worth of his claim? No, he cannot, or he would not want to sell untold millions for five thousand dollars."

Then he looked at the claim-seller again.

"You will sell your proprietorship for the sum mentioned, will you?"

"For five thousand it is yours."

"And a conduct to it?"

"Yes."

"What are your terms of payment?"

"If I sell to you, Colonel Talbot, not one dollar of purchase money is to be paid until you have received the property at my hands—one delivery follows the other."

"That is fair."

"I thought so."

"When can you go to the claim?"

"At any time almost, but I prefer to go by night."

"Some special reason, I presume?"

"Yes."

"Can you set out after sundown to-day?"

"I can."

"Have you horses?"

"Unfortunately, no."

"Then, I will furnish them."

"You accept my proposition, then?"

"I will take the claim at the price named."

"A thousand thanks, colonel. You will let me go back to the Shasta mines with a stake that may grow when I am thar. To-night, you say?"

"To-night at—seven shall it be?"

"At seven. Meanwhile, you will let me keep this?" and Marigold's hand stole across the table and picked up the map he had placed upon it.

Colonel Cupid interposed no objection, but he did not lose sight of the diagram until it was again in the claim-owner's pocket.

"Luck follows luck. By Jove! I'm destined to enjoy a streak of it," thought Talbot. "I could not have wished for a better thing than this. It is none of my business how this man, Marigold, came to own the claim which undoubtedly takes in the mine marked out on Barton's map. I have but to follow him to the spot so as to get a knowledge of the country. It is fortunate that Shasta Sam and the Centaur are out after the New York sleuth. I can follow up this unexpected fortune without being hampered by them. To-night at seven, sir."

He spoke the last sentence aloud and to the man who still occupied the chair near the table.

"I'll be on deck."

The following second Mark Marigold bowed himself out, and Colonel Cupid touched a bell ready to his hand.

"Follow that man, Nolan, and report," he said to the youth who answered the summons. "Don't let him suspect the espionage."

"Ay, ay, sir."

Mark Marigold went from the nabob's house to the Gold Brick Hotel, a public resort with which the reader is already in some degree acquainted.

Nolan close at his heels, saw him disappear beyond the door.

He could not follow him further.

"Didn't he clutch at the bait? By Jove! he almost jumped at the cork!" cried the mine-seller when he had shut the door of one of the little up-stairs rooms behind him. "From the gleam his eyes got when I gave him the paper, he must have seen something like it before. I wonder where, Colonel Talbot; I wonder where. At seven to-night, eh? And you are going to furnish the horses. How eagerly clever, by George! And they'll be good horses, too, for you own nothing else, colonel."

The man laughed aloud at the close of his speech, and then catching his beard he flung it half-way across the room.

"I want to be myself once more!" cried he. "I don't wear these things only when I have to," and then he stood revealed as Sunshine Sam, Captain Coldgrip's pard, and the last captive of the Devil's Basin!

CHAPTER XVIII.

CAPTAIN COLDGRIP'S MISHAP.

"WELL, I'm swamped. The horse and his rider ar' lost as effectually as though the ground had opened and swallowed both. Isn't that about the way it strikes you, Shasta?"

The man addressed bent his head and smiled.

"But thar must be a trail somewhar," he said, quickly.

"Find it."

"We can't go back to Colonel Cupid with a mere report of 'lost in the mountains.' You know what the instructions were?"

"Yes. We were to find and finish Captain Coldgrip."

"Well, we found him."

"But the rest of the business. How about that?"

"Ay," laughed Shasta Sam, "there's whar the rub is."

The two pards of Deadwood, Leon Talbot's

lieutenants, sat on their steeds in the heart of a wild landscape.

The Black Hills trailers were discouraged, not to say disgusted.

They had lost the New York spotter's trail which they had followed some distance after shooting at him in Deadwood. We have seen how the hoof-prints ended abruptly on the trail, and how the puzzled trackers were obliged to turn back under the impression that Captain Claude's horse had retraced his steps.

It was near the close of the day that had followed the night of exciting incidents, and the trail of the detective was still lost.

Was it possible that he had escaped with his life, after he had tumbled forward on his horse at the crack of the revolvers?

The two sports could not take this view of the case.

They wanted to believe that the horse had carried the detective deep among the mountains by a bridle-path, and that he had perished there. But then, they wanted proof of this.

All day they had made diligent search for the Atlantic sleuth. They had been back to the spot where the trail had ended the night before, but no new developments threw any light on the mystery.

When the conversation just recorded took place, the twin pards were within a stone's throw of the perpendicular walls of the Devil's Basin.

"Let's ride down and see how the boys hung Captain Coldgrip's spy," suddenly suggested Shasta Sam.

"I am with you. It is light enough yet to see the basket, even if the vultures have been thar and had their feast. They swung him over the needle rock, so the colonel tells me."

The men rode away, and after awhile halted near the brink of the wall, where they slid from their saddles and crept forward.

"Great heavens!" cried Deadwood Duke, "thar's neither man nor basket in sight."

The pards were bending side by side over the basin, and directly beneath their position projected the rock from which Sunshine Sam had swung in his network of ropes.

"Mebbe the birds, in their fight over him slipped the noose off o' the rock an' let him drop," suggested Shasta Sam, and then he tried to discern objects at the foot of the wall three hundred feet below.

"What do you make out?" asked the Centaur, anxiously.

"Nothing but rocks and grass."

"No man?"

"No man."

Deadwood Duke turned and walked toward his horse with the sullenness of a baffled lion.

"Look here!" cried Shasta Sam, pointing to the ground. "Somebody helped the sleuth's spy out o' his net."

"I can see that now," answered the other, when he had examined the marks of horseshoes on the ground. "Who did it? None o' the boys, of course?"

"No. The master helped the man."

The Deadwood Centaur gave Shasta a look that was very expressive, and then climbed into the saddle.

"This man is no infant, is he, Duke?"

"He's a giant!"

"We have two men to look for from now on."

"Yes."

For a moment the conversation was broken. All at once the Centaur leaned toward his companion and caught his eye.

"Look here, Shasta. We are sworn friends, ain't we?" he asked.

"We are."

"Do you think we ought to withhold secrets from one another?"

"Who's been doing it?"

Deadwood Duke gave his pard a searching look.

"Captain Shasta, if one-half o' Deadwood doesn't lie, you've got a bonanza somewhar."

Shasta Sam kept his composure as if he expected a declaration of the kind.

"I wish I had one, by Jove, I do!" he smiled.

"Where do they say my bonanza is, Duke?"

"Of course they don't know. They see you come to Deadwood once a month flush and full o' fight. They say that means something."

"What do you think?"

There was an emphasis to Shasta Sam's words which struck the man who heard them.

"I've thought you could have no bonanza which you would not be willing to share with me."

"Good for you, Duke," and Shasta Sam patted his companion playfully on the back.

"Of course I would share it with an old pard like you."

"Then, you've got no hidden mine?"

"Yes I have."

The Deadwood Centaur started.

"My bonanza is in Denver and what I get from it I rake over the tables there."

Deadwood Duke's countenance fell.

"Is *that* the way?" he asked in disappointed tones.

Shasta nodded.

"But Deadwood doesn't give you a bonanza o'

that sort," said he. "They give you credit for owning a secret mine, and some go so far as to say that you have found the Lost Angel, for which Colonel Cupid is playing his hand against Mad Barton and Captain Coldgrip."

The next moment Shasta Sam fell back and gave vent to a laugh which drew the Centaur's whole attention to him.

"What! I own the Lost Angel?" he exclaimed. "Jupiter Pluvius! they would make a millionaire out of a pauper! What does the colonel say to these reports, Duke?"

"I never heard him mention them."

"Then, what does White Beard say?"

"He is as silent on that subject as he is on all others when he is closeted with Leon."

"Is he discursive then?"

"If not, when does he talk?"

There was no reply, for at that moment Shasta Sam rose in his stirrups, and shaded his eyes with his hand against the setting sun shining in his face.

The Centaur watched him a few seconds without speaking.

"It is gone now, but I saw it," said Shasta, dropping back into the saddle.

"You saw what?"

"A horse's head top the rocks down yonder."

"I saw nothing."

"Your eyes were not turned that way at the time."

The two pards rode on, but talking no longer about the lost bonanza.

If Shasta Sam had seen a horse's head, the incident was enough to put them on their guard.

Every now and then they would draw rein and standing erect in their stirrups would scan the country ahead.

Lower and lower sunk the sun, and long shadows blended where the skeleton pines lifted their heads toward the sky.

Suddenly Shasta Sam darted forward and clutched the Deadwood Centaur's rein.

"Back! but with no sound," he ordered. "The horseman is on hand."

Instantly the Deadwood pards fell back among the trees, and then, believing themselves well hidden, they drew their revolvers and waited with fingers at the triggers.

"Look! he comes," whispered Shasta. "If this isn't blunt luck, may I never report to the colonel."

Now it was that Deadwood Duke saw the person whom Captain Shasta's eyes had already discovered. A short distance down the trail appeared a horse and his rider.

The animal was moving forward slowly, and the man in the saddle was watched like a hawk by the dark-shirted Deadwooders on the fringe of the road.

"It is the man of all men—Captain Coldgrip!" murmured Shasta.

"Then we must make no mistake."

If the man so near was the hunted ferret from the East, he was riding into the power of men who were the merciless exponents of trigger law.

Suddenly the horse stopped in the trail and threw up his head.

He had snuffed the steeds of the Deadwood pards.

Betrayal would follow next.

"Now!" said Shasta Sam, in a low whisper. "Cover him, and leave the rest to me."

These words were succeeded by the lifting of two revolvers, and then the voice of Sam broke the silence:

"Halt!"

The horse in their front stopped without a signal from his rider.

Thirty feet separated the two parties.

"Which way?" continued Shasta Sam.

"Is it for you to know, gentlemen?" was the quick reply, and the twin hunters in Colonel Cupid's employ saw at once the look that accompanied the words.

"We ask, anyhow," answered Sam, with a grim smile. "We thought, perhaps, you'd lost the trail. Your back is turned toward Deadwood."

"Well?"

"Oh, away with deception! You are Claude Coldgrip, the Yankee sleuth-hound. We know you as well as if you had your name emblazoned on your breast. We did not expect to see you ride into our clutches thus easily, captain. Not after missing you last night, ha, ha!"

"You missed me, then?"

"Confound it, yes. But we don't miss a fellow long," added Shasta Sam. "Captain Coldgrip, you are not unacquainted with the customs of the Wild West. You have been here before on business, and the errand that brought you from New York this time is full of hazard. We make no concealment of our purpose. I am Shasta Sam; the man on my right is the Deadwood Centaur. We intend to end where we sit in our saddles the Dakota trail which lured you from the Atlantic. The game we play is merciless. Now, Captain Claude of the cold hand, we press the deadliest triggers in the Black Hills. The Lost Angel bonanza remains for us to find. This is the end of your hunt for millions. Now, may Heaven receive your soul!"

CHAPTER XIX.

A THUNDERBOLT.

"WELL, Nolan, you followed him?"

"I did."

"And he went whither?"

"Straight to the Gold Brick."

Leon Talbot bowed, and Nolan, his servant, retired.

It was evident that the millionaire of Deadwood had no thought that the man who had agreed to sell him a certain claim was none other than Mark Marigold, as he represented himself to be.

The strangest thing connected with the affair was that, right on the heels of his success at Mad Barton's house, he should be offered a piece of ground which undoubtedly held the valuable property known as Lost Angel Mine.

It was the most striking coincidence of his life.

"Before I set out for the mountains with this claim-seller, I'll look in on Coralie," Talbot said to himself late in the afternoon of the same day.

"The girl must be made to feel that I am her friend. Of course she does not suspect what happened in her home just before she came back from her hunt for a doctor, and she must not find out, either. The young sawbones she went after did not respond. He left Deadwood the last time she went away, and almost at her heels, too. He could not have saved Barton anyhow. Captain Xerxes and his gold hills outlaws made sure work of him. But, thank fortune, they left life enough in him to play into my hands. By Jove! it was blunt luck, and in a few hours I will double my wealth and be the richest man between the Missouri and the Pacific!"

Colonel Cupid had not forgotten that Marigold Mark was to return at seven for the journey to the claim he had sold, and ere he left the house he gave Nolan certain commands about the horses.

At four he appeared at the door of Coralie Barton's home, and the person who opened it was the fair young girl herself.

There were traces of deep sorrow on the face presented for the Deadwood nabob's inspection, and he saw that the girl was trying to remain self-possessed while she conducted him into the little parlor, humbly furnished, but neat.

"I have come to offer you assistance in any shape in my power," began the gold king. "If you wish means, any draft on me will be cheerfully honored; if you desire a strong hand to help you strike the scoundrels who orphaned you, you will find it in my power to furnish one."

"I am in need of no help," answered Coralie, bravely meeting the look that accompanied the offer of assistance. "Although my father has been taken from me, I am not left destitute."

Colonel Cupid thought he detected a tinge of pride in the voice.

"I did not know your father was above the ordinary," he said. "I thought—"

"That he depended on finding the lost mine ever uppermost in his thoughts?" interrupted Coralie, with a slight smile. "I believe such is the prevailing opinion in Deadwood, and I shall not trouble myself to contradict it. As for vengeance," the eyes of the speaker appeared to get a flash, "the time for that will come."

The next minute a door across the room opened and partly admitted a young man, who started slightly on seeing Talbot.

Coralie's glance flitted instantly from man to man.

"You came too late, doctor," spoke the nabob, fixing a strange look on the youth, who couldn't have been past twenty-three, and who was known in Deadwood as Doctor Finch, a cool, courageous fellow.

"Alas! no," was the reply. "The best surgery on earth could not have saved him, although it might have prolonged life a few hours. A man with five pistol-balls in him has a meager chance for life. The wonder is that he kept up to die under his own roof."

"It is astonishing!" Talbot replied, with a look toward Coralie, who had turned away.

"He was always a man of nerve."

"You would have thought so, gentlemen, if you could have seen him face the fiends who took his life!" suddenly cried the girl, whirling about and confronting her visitors, but more particularly the Deadwood millionaire. "A braver man than my father, Blake Barton, never stood with open eyes before his heartless executioners. It was murder in cold blood, and the height of cruelty. Say ye there shall be no retribution? Ah! you forget that the blood of the dead animates the heart of the living!"

The young doctor joined Coralie at the close of her last sentence, and spoke to her a moment in low tones.

After that he turned upon Talbot, and with a farewell salute passed from the house.

"The devil take him!" mentally exclaimed the nabob. "I wish the road-robbers had finished him the same time they stopped Barton's bonanza-hunt. If he thinks, however, that he can play a winning hand against me, all he has to do is to sail in and try."

Coralie was the first to speak after the youthful doctor's departure.

"Colonel Talbot, are you certain that nobody left the house first before you entered this morning?" she asked.

The singular question, totally unexpected, startled Leon Talbot.

"I cannot say," he responded promptly. "I saw no one quit the premises."

"You heard no noise while you were in the house?"

"None."

"It is very strange," Coralie said, as if speaking to herself, although the words reached Colonel Cupid's ears.

"What has happened?"

"That is a difficult question to answer. Nothing may have occurred, after all. I made a strange discovery after you went away."

"Strange, Coralie?"

"Strange to me, at least. I found on the floor, at the foot of the table, father's favorite pen, and on it was some ink not yet dry."

Expecting something connected with the mad prospector's death, Talbot had steeled his nerves for its reception.

"It is singular," he remarked. "But you found no freshly-written manuscript?"

"Nothing at all. He was on the floor unconscious, if not dead, when you came?"

"Yes, Coralie."

"He may have intended to leave a message of some kind," the girl went on.

"The ink on the pen would indicate that."

"So I have thought. Is this your theory, Colonel Talbot?"

"If you ask for one, I must give it as mine. The pen was dipped into the ink, but before he could touch it to the paper, the silent messenger came."

Coralie Barton seemed to draw back.

Her eyes were fastened on the man who delivered this opinion with the coolness of a modern Mephistopheles, and the look pierced him through like an arrow.

"Colonel Talbot, my father knew you before he came to Deadwood on hunt of the Lost Angel bonanza," said the girl, slowly.

"I was not aware of that."

"Let me go back. Between three and four years ago there lived in the city of New York a man named Blonden. He was reputed wealthy. At any rate, he drew up a will and stored it away in an iron safe in his library. One morning Cyrus Blonden was found dead in his house, which had been plundered by the person who had taken his life. The safe was found unlocked and its papers were in confusion. As Blonden was a man somewhat eccentric, he had few friends, and only one confederate. That man kept in the background, but he directed the detectives who attempted to solve the Blonden mystery. Years have passed since the double crime, and nobody has been punished for it. You recollect the murder, Colonel Talbot?"

"I?" cried the Deadwood nabob.

"Pardon me, yes. You were in New York at the time. It was before you sought fortune in the West. Do you recall the conversation you had in the ferry-house one night with a gentleman who impressed you so strangely that, instead of crossing the river as you had intended doing, you let the boat go without you, and followed him up-town?"

The expression on Talbot's face was a singular one.

"I only want to fix several circumstances in your mind," continued Coralie. "You recollect the ferry-house episode?"

"I recall it, but, indeed, girl, it had quite escaped me."

Coralie rewarded him with a hurried smile.

"The gentleman with whom you conversed that night was my father."

"Impossible!"

"My father, and the man who employed the city detectives to hunt the murderer of Cyrus Blonden down. Three years made a great change in his appearance. You did not recognize him when he came to Deadwood determined to find the lost bonanza which has cost him his life."

Colonel Cupid exhibited genuine astonishment to the young girl who was speaking coolly.

"Now, having convinced you that my father met you thousands of miles from here, before you even thought of becoming the millionaire of the gold mines, I want to go a step further."

What was coming next?

Leon Talbot tried to read the future in Coralie's face, but the task was a fruitless one.

"We will go back to the pen found under the table this morning," she proceeded. "Colonel Talbot, will you please deliver up the last document that came from my father's hands?"

It was a thunderbolt, and one against which the gold-bug of Deadwood had raised no protection.

"What means this accusation?" exclaimed Talbot, flushing under the girl's look.

"Were my words riddles? I asked you for the paper drawn up by the pen ere it fell from the nerveless fingers of the dead. You are looked upon as being all-powerful here. Your wealth gives you an authority which you do not hesitate to use when it is for your benefit. I am but a woman, Colonel Talbot, and the

dearest friend I had lies beyond yon threshold ready for the grave on the mountain. I want my own. I ask for nothing else. The paper he drew up ere he died was for me. It fell into your hands, pardon my bluntness. Will you restore it, Colonel Talbot?"

"Coralie, you are terribly mistaken," cried the Deadwood Croesus, gaining his feet. "I have told you how I found him. If you will not believe—"

"I cannot. The moistened pen is not all the proof I have. I have kept the main witness back."

A cold contemptuous sneer curled the nabob's lips.

"Bring on your proof!" he exclaimed. "If you want to cross swords with Talbot of Deadwood, by heavens, girl, you will find your hands full!"

"I seek no strife. As for the proof I have withheld, you shall have it. You pronounced my father dead before the spark of life departed."

Colonel Cupid recoiled.

"He revived for a moment, and his mind was never more clear than then. Leon Talbot, I know that he left on the table the diagram of the Lost Angel Mine. It fell into your hands!"

There was fire in the eyes which glared at Coralie.

"Well, if all this is true—if he left the secret here as you say—get it if you can!" was the answer.

CHAPTER XX.

NETTED.

"YES, let her get it if she can."

Colonel Cupid was home again, and he uttered this triumphant sentence in the seclusion of his private chamber.

Coralie had cast at his feet a thunderbolt entirely unlooked for, and it had taken him some time to recover.

Was it true, as the girl had declared, that Barton, the mad prospector, had come to his senses before death, and that he had imparted the secret of the existence of the last made plot of the lost bonanza region?

"Maybe, after all, it was nothing but a game of bluff," thought Talbot, and then he recalled Coralie's manner, and her tones. "No, it was not bluff," he corrected. "The girl was in earnest, but the young doctor put her up to it ere he went away. That is what his whispers meant. Wait till I have located the claim Mark Marigold has sold me; then, my young meddler, I will turn on you and give you a sample of Leon Talbot's power."

A few minutes later the Deadwood nabob received Nolan his servant who announced that Mark Marigold was on hand.

"Seven o'clock, eh?" exclaimed Talbot. "By Jove! the hours went by like a four-in-hand. The horses, Nolan?"

"They are ready."

Colonel Cupid retired to his wardrobe, but soon reappeared dressed for a horseback journey.

He wore under his jacket a brace of revolvers with which he was careful to arm himself, but the plat he had secured fresh from Barton's hands he left in the strong safe in Nolan's care.

When he went out he found two horses in front of the house, and near them the figure of the claim-seller who had appeared promptly at the appointed hour.

The two men exchanged greetings and, watched by Nolan, mounted and rode away.

Although the hour was not late, Deadwood was getting gloomy in the shadows of the night almost at hand.

Talbot looked searchingly into the face of his companion.

Perhaps he remembered that he had set Nolan on his trail, and that the only report had been that Mark Marigold had been tracked to the Gold Brick Hotel.

But there was nothing about his guide to give rise to suspicion.

If the man could cast off and assume his beard at will, he knew how to play the game in hand to perfection.

"Which way?" asked Talbot, when they had reached the confines of Deadwood.

"South for a spell, colonel," answered Marigold with a smile. "If I mistake not, we ride over the spot where they found Jacinto Jack several nights ago."

"We do. Did you know the fellow?"

The gold guide shook his head.

"What did he amount to?" he inquired.

"Not much to anybody outside of himself. We called him the Deadwood Model."

"A dandy, eh?"

"A Black Hills fop."

"I don't see who would want the blood of such a man."

"Probably the person who got it could impart some information," and Colonel Cupid looked away while he spoke.

"That is true. I've seen enough of life to know that every man has his foe. I wouldn't give a lump o' quartz for a fellow with whom the world was at peace."

"Nor I. And I would not give a pinch of

grass for the man who has not snap enough to strike when he should."

After this the ride was continued for some time in silence.

"Think you you can find the claim after dark?" suddenly questioned Talbot with eagerness, as he gazed into the face of the man at his side.

"You are willing to try me, are you not?"

"That is why I am here. I have a curiosity to know how you came to discover the claim you have sold me. Would you mind the telling while we ride along?"

"I would not."

Colonel Cupid moved his horse nearer the animal ridden by Marigold Mark, and they were moving along side by side.

It was a somewhat strange story that fell from the claim-seller's tongue.

It was lengthened unnecessarily, but that did not matter to Talbot so long as the narrative was interesting. Mark Marigold had come by the bonanza map in a region remote from the Black Hills. For a long time he was inclined to consider it of but little value, and only when he was hard up and driven almost to the doors of want by a succession of misfortunes, did he attempt to prove its correctness.

Such, in brief, was the substance of the story told to Leon Talbot, the Deadwood nabob, by the man who rode at his knee.

"I may find thousands on your claim," Talbot said watching the gold sport closely.

"Well, I've sold it. What do I care?"

"You never squeal, then?"

"I?" and Marigold Mark looked into Colonel Cupid's face and laughed. "You don't know me, colonel. When I sell, I sell. If my bonanza claim trebles your wealth, you won't find Marigold Mark asking for another dollar. But, by Jupiter, I don't see what you want with more money."

"We never get enough."

"Mebbe not."

"Why don't you look for a queen for your Deadwood palace?"

Colonel Cupid started a little.

"You can have your choice, you know—your wealth would get you the most beautiful. It wouldn't do for me to be heeled in like Leon Talbot."

"Ho, ho! perhaps not. When I want a wife, I will get one."

"That is business. But you'll look beyond Deadwood, eh, colonel?"

"Why beyond Deadwood? You cannot have mingled in society there."

"Not much, that's a fact. I've seen one pretty woman in the town; no, by Jove! two of them."

"Ah! who are the fair creatures that have struck your fancy?"

"One is called Coralie—Coralie Barton, isn't it?—the daughter of a man whose hobby was the existence of a gold mine somewhere?"

"I know the young lady."

"Well, she is pretty."

"Yes."

"She is deucedly handsome," said Marigold with emphasis.

"I'll admit that."

"She needs a protector now as her father is dead. I don't know what might happen if I was in somebody's shoes. But don't consider me a rival if you turn your eyes toward the prettiest woman in Deadwood. I'm only delivering an opinion, Colonel Talbot."

"I understand you. Now, who is the other woman?"

"Hang me, if I can tell you. I saw her en route for Deadwood."

"When?"

"The other day. I presume she got here. In fact, the proprietor of the Gold Brick told me as much."

"Was she as pretty as Coralie? in your opinion, mind you," asked the nabob eagerly.

"No. She was older than the mine-hunter's daughter. She had brilliant eyes, and a rich complexion. Between the two I should choose Coralie, for the other can be a tigress when crossed. You asked for my opinion, colonel. There, you have it."

"Where is this last mentioned woman?"

"She did not remain long the Gold Brick's guest."

"I wish I had seen her."

Leon Talbot could coolly talk thus of the woman whom he had sent over the same trail they were traversing in the clutches of his faithful lieutenant Shasta Sam.

He could look into Mark Marigold's face and ask about Lucia who at that moment he believed to be filling a grave which the mountains would hide forever. For had not Shasta Sam delivered his report of the journey, and had he not cast upon his (Talbot's) table a ring which confirmed the deed he had been sent to do?

And he was now quizzing the claim-seller about New York Lucia, and saying that he wished he had seen the woman!

"When will we reach the locality?" asked Talbot, with manifest impatience some time after his companion's estimate of the beauty of the two women.

Marigold Mark looked up at the rocks and

trees here and there revealed by the moon which had come out in the brilliant heavens.

"We are in the region now."

Colonel Cupid could not keep back a cry of exultation.

"Make no mistake, Captain Marigold."

"With five thousand to be lost, hey? I'm not the man for that."

Five minutes later the nabob's guide drew rein.

Deadwood was far behind them, and Colonel Cupid had been guided into the center of a region noted for its wildness.

"Do you tell me that the claim is here?" exclaimed Talbot. "Why, I know men who have mined in this vicinity."

"I can't help that."

"We call this region Satan's Pocket. It is dotted with abandoned mines."

"Then you do not want my claim?" and Talbot of Deadwood saw the face of his guide thrust forward while a flash of resentment lit up his eyes.

"I have not said so. I only mentioned that old mines were here."

Marigold drew from his pockets a paper and a match. The latter he struck on his saddle and held it close to the paper already open.

There was no wind, and the match burned well.

"Look at it again!" he cried, calling the Deadwood nabob's attention to the paper. "See where this black line forks."

"I see it."

"Well, the trail forks here."

"I know that."

"And within one hundred yards from this spot the journey ends."

"At the bonanza?"

"At my bonanza."

"If that is true, go ahead."

The match was sent flickering to the ground at the horses' feet, and the plot went back to the guide's pocket.

Once more the two men rode forward.

Colonel Cupid's hand had crept close to the six-shooter under his coat.

"If this should be a game I'll kill this man at the drop of an eyelash," he said under his breath.

"Ho!" ejaculated Marigold Mark sharply a few seconds later, and as the two steeds stopped, he darted toward the Deadwood nabob and laid a finger on his wrist. "Don't make any noise, Colonel Cupid. You have been right cleverly hoodwinked. Come! admit it."

Leon Talbot drew back. His look was riveted fiercely on the man who touched him.

"What do you mean?"

"Only this: I am the man you sent to the Devil's Basin under a death guard. I am Sunshine Sam, Captain Coldgrip's right bower, and, if you will have a little patience, the captain will be here in a few minutes."

The gold-bug was speechless.

CHAPTER XXI.

IS IT A DOUBLE PLAY?

DECEIVED! caught!

The outcome of the bargain for the gold claim thrilled and exasperated the millionaire of Deadwood.

He threw one hand to his revolver pocket, but Sunshine Sam clutched it and looked him in the eye.

"Do it if you wish, colonel," said the false Marigold firmly. "If you want to lose the Deadwood millions all at once, resist the man who caught you with a golden bait."

"Where is your master?" demanded Talbot. "You said he would be here. I see nothing of the man you serve."

"Wait," answered Sam.

"Why has this infamous trick been played?"

"The story is not for me to tell."

"Do I stand between Captain Coldgrip and some success? He knows better than to accuse me of any crime. By heavens! I am almost czar back yonder in Deadwood."

Sunshine Sam looked at his prisoner, but made no reply.

"Your man isn't coming," suddenly continued Talbot. "You cannot hold me without a warrant of authority, and some captures prove dangerous in this country."

"So they do," answered Sam, with a sparkle to his eyes. "I recall one that sent a man to the Devil's Basin."

"How did you get away?"

"I was helped out by one of his imps."

"I don't believe it," growled the nabob, and Sam showed his teeth in a grin.

Several seconds more passed.

The colonel's captor looked down the moonlight-spotted trail, but saw nothing.

What detained the Atlantic sleuth?

"Come," he spoke suddenly to Talbot. "We will go on."

"Not a foot!" grated the Deadwood money-king.

Sam was thrilled by the firmness of the reply.

"I dare not kill this man," he thought. "And he will not move an inch. The captain was to have met me here at this time, but he is not on deck. Shall I give up the prize I have taken? Must I liberate Leon Talbot, the man we have

crossed the continent for, and let him go back to organize his men against us? I can't afford to let him go. I must hold him till I find Captain Claude."

Talbot, who was eying Sunshine Sam closely, like a tiger watches the tamer in the cage for a chance to break to freedom, seemed to read his thoughts.

"What are you going to do?" he asked. "I am not to be kept from my business in Deadwood. My mines demand my presence there. You have played a cool game. I have been taken in by the claim story. Whenever you want me, Sunshine Sam, I will put myself at your service."

"Yes, you will," smiled Sam, incredulously.

"You dare not try me," and Talbot spoke with a seriousness calculated to impress the man who listened. "If I were to tell you that whenever you come to my house after to-night and ask me to go with you, I will go without a question, you would not believe?"

"I would not."

"Then I need not waste words."

"But you were not going to tell me that, eh?"

"Why not?"

"Well, go on, then."

The nabob appeared to catch a breath of hope.

"It is anything to get out of this fellow's hands," entered his mind. "If I can turn the tables on him, I must do so, by fair means or foul. In Deadwood I will spread a net of death for this fox and his master. A successful lie in a pinch is better than a truth when it is not wanted."

"I say you dare not take the word of Leon Talbot," he went on aloud. "I tell you solemnly, Sunshine Sam, that, after to-night, I will go with you without question, and face the charges which any living man dare bring against me. Now, accept or decline."

"Why not go now?"

"I have unsettled business in Deadwood. There are nine mines to be looked after. I confess that several need immediate attention, and such as only their owner can give. It is a matter of business with me. After that you or Captain Coldgrip cannot come too soon."

Sunshine Sam fell back.

"By Jericho! go!" he exclaimed, releasing Talbot's hand.

"I'm going to take your promise. If Captain Claude war here, I'd let him say what should be done. At any time, eh? We may come to-morrow."

"To-morrow let it be! Ask any man in Deadwood if Talbot's word was ever broken. I think I know what is up; but, never mind."

Captain Coldgrip's spy for a moment regretted his action, but he flung regret aside as he thought:

"After all, whither could I have taken him? I might not find the captain before morning. Let the Deadwood nabob go. I won't forget his promise, and, by the stars above me! I'll call for him some time."

Talbot tried to keep back all signs of his unexpected triumph.

"Will you ride back with me?" he asked.

"Not to-night, colonel."

"Then, good-by! I give you credit for playing a clever hand—a deucedly clever one."

Sam saw him turn his horse's head toward Deadwood, and then followed a parting salute which was answered by a "good-night" from the sleuth's pard's lips.

"Gone he is!" exclaimed Sam, watching the figures of Talbot and his steed disappear up the trail. "If I had known this, I would not have been so fast. Confound it! why didn't Captain Claude show up? 'I'll be there' was the promise he gave me when we parted, but he has failed to keep it. Failed for once. Jericho! it was hard to set free the cool rascal who had me hung over the Devil's Basin in a rope basket; but I could not hold him forever, though I once resolved to march him away from here. I don't very often open my trap and let the game out. I'll hold him next time. Ah, don't you forget this, Colonel Cupid, nabob, rascal and fox!"

Already the sound of hoofs had died away, and Sunshine Sam rode leisurely from the scene of the singular outcome of his play.

Again and again he wrestled with a mental question.

Where was Captain Claude?

When not far from the forked trail Sam turned into a narrower path and was lost to view.

As for the man who had turned the tables on him, he was riding back to Deadwood swiftly over the main trail.

"I'm anxious to build the dead-fall. I want to crush out all opposition. Satan take me for believing the story told by this fellow who got his schooling from Captain Coldgrip himself. Yes, I'll go with him when he calls for me—when he calls!" and the laugh of Colonel Cupid echoed among the rocks which rose above the road he was on.

"Deadwood!" he cried, catching sight of a hundred lights ahead, and the horse was put to greater speed. "Now, if my lieutenants have not finished the New York spotter, and will

only come to me for new orders, I will fasten my grip on the lost bonanza. Lucia won't bother me any more, and I hold the plot drawn by Barton with death at his heartstrings. Say I am not still the power of the Deadwood country! Ha! the hand of Talbot can crush a mountain of iron when it stands between him and his ends."

Down through Deadwood dashed the horse that bore Talbot to his door.

He sprang from the saddle and struck the animal a blow which sent him to the stables.

"Nolan, where are you?" rung out his voice as he entered the house. "Nolan! Nolan! in the library at once!"

He passed on to the room to which he had summoned his servant, and a moment later he threw open the door.

Heavens! what was before him?

In a chair in the middle of the room, tied and gagged, with hardly a vestige of life about him, sat the person he had just called—Nolan.

Beyond him the door of the safe stood open, and in front of it a lot of papers littered the floor.

"In fortune's name, who has been here?" cried Talbot. "Decoyed to the mountains and robbed while away! I see through the whole scheme. It was a double play."

Nolan was cut loose as quick as a knife could be made to work. The gag was next jerked from his mouth, and he was left to get his breath, if he was not already dead.

The Deadwood millionaire threw himself in front of the rifled safe.

His hands overturned the papers, some of which he tore in his eagerness.

"Gone! gone! I knew it the moment I crossed the threshold," he exclaimed. "The mission of the Atlantic ferret to this house was the theft of the lost bonanza map. And I was first duped!"

He turned to Nolan, who had uttered a strange sound, and found the man's eyes regarding him in a kind of half stare.

"Who did this? Out with the tale!" and he bent over the semi-conscious man, and sunk his fingers in his arms like the talons of a hawk.

There was no answer, though Nolan made several attempts to speak.

Talbot shook his servant violently in mingled impatience and rage, crying:

"I'll shake your tongue loose. Who did this? Was it the sleuth-hound from the East?"

Nolan cast his eyes at the safe, and the sight that met them seemed to unstring his nerves anew.

"To the devil with you then!" growled Talbot, pushing the witness away. "I get at the truth through another channel."

He turned from Nolan, and was about to move toward the door, when it opened.

"Ah, the very man I want," was the exclamation, for the person who came forward was Shasta Sam, the giant sport of the Hills.

"Hello! who's been here?"

The tough stopped short, and his dilated eyes wandered from the littered floor to the statue-like nabob before him.

"The Yankee sleuth was here—the man you and the Centaur were to hunt down and finish. This is his work," and Talbot pointed at the unmistakable proofs of robbery in the room.

"It can't be, colonel," declared Sam, still astonished.

"Wait till you hear it all. I was decoyed to the mountains by the detective's pard. It was a double game. When Sunshine Sam knew they had no further use for me they let me go, and I rode back like the wind to find things in this shape."

"What does Nolan say?"

"He can't talk."

"Can't, eh?" cried Shasta Sam striding toward the wild-eyed youth in the chair. "I'll make him open his head or kill him!"

The next instant the big sport pounced upon Nolan and his terrible clutch wrenched a cry from his throat.

"Now question him," laughed Sam.

Colonel Cupid was quickly at Nolan's side.

"Who did this?" he cried.

"A—a woman!"

Talbot recoiled a step.

"Impossible! The girl could not have done it without help."

"It was no girl, but a woman in a mask."

Talbot looked at the giant sport.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE SLEUTH IN DEADWOOD.

It was some time before Leon Talbot recovered from the surprise into which he had been thrown by Nolan's revelation.

His first thought was of Coralie, but when the young man declared that the mad prospector's daughter had not had a hand in the work, he could only look at Shasta Sam and mutely ask for his opinion.

Nolan persisted it was not Coralie. He knew her figure too well.

"Did she speak?" asked Talbot.

"I did not hear a word. I was tumbled from my chair before I could protest against the robbery, and when I came to I found myself seated

in it again and in the condition in which you found me."

The Deadwood nabob growled his disgust.

"What did she take from the safe?" and Nolan looked closely at Talbot.

"A very precious document."

"Any money?"

"Not a dollar."

"It is a singular crime," observed Shasta Sam.

"All the more so because a woman committed it. If Coralie was not here, who did come?"

The giant tough shook his head.

A moment later Colonel Cupid gave his lieutenant a look which drew him into an adjoining room.

"Pardon my eagerness, Shasta," the young millionaire said, touching the sport's arm. "But are you certain you left her powerless for harm?"

"You heard my report, colonel?"

"Yes."

"Why question it now? You accepted it at the time it was made."

"So I did, but I cannot fix this swoop on any one unless—"

"Unless Lucia came back from the dead and perpetrated it?" laughed Shasta Sam.

"Not from the dead, of course. That is out of the question. I dismiss the thought, Shasta. Now, what luck had you in the mountains?"

"A good beginning but a bad ending."

"Explain."

"We found Captain Coldgrip. We tracked him to Fortune's Folly. When he came out and mounted, the Centaur and I covered him in the starlight and tumbled him forward on his horse. Then came a chase after a fatally wounded man, as we supposed. It was a long run. We lost the trail among the Hills, but found it only to lose it again. At last, however, we found the quarry."

"Found the New York sleuth, eh?"

"The arch wizard himself! It was an unexpected find, colonel. Captain Coldgrip rode into our hands without any effort of ours to entrap him."

"And you had all the cards to yourselves?"

"Yes," answered Shasta Sam, speaking in disappointed tones through his teeth. "I regret to have to report that the bird we had in our hands is now in the bush."

"What! the spotter get away when you and Duke held him at the mercy of your six-shooters?"

"That is exactly what transpired."

"Tell me."

"Never before was I more certain of my man," resumed the Deadwooder. "When we had told him that his hunt for the Lost Angel had come to a close, so surely had we him in the death circle, I was about to signal Duke to fire. Then came the unexpected."

"In Heaven's name what was it?"

"All at once Captain Coldgrip dropped on his horse's neck, and the animal, cut by the spurs, came forward like a cannon-ball."

"Straight at you?"

"As straight as an arrow. We were driven apart by the onset. I was thrown to the left, the Centaur and his horse pitched to the right. Duke's animal was killed by the fall, and I fell under mine. Jebu! what a charge it was! I have heard of such things, but if they are like Captain Coldgrip's dash, may I never see another. He got away."

Talbot could not conceal his displeasure.

"And you did not follow?" he asked.

"I had to help a man who appeared to be fatally hurt."

"The Centaur?"

"Yes."

"Where is he?"

"Nursing a broken arm in the mountains. Captain Coldgrip took the chances. They were desperate indeed, not one lucky one in a thousand."

"Satan helps his own."

Shasta Sam glanced through the door ajar into the room beyond, and the smile that appeared at the corners of his mouth seemed to say that Satan for once had deserted an ally.

"When did this occur, Shasta?" continued Talbot.

"To-night. I came back to Deadwood when I had made Duke comfortable. It is not the report I promised to make, nor the one you wanted; but it is the best I have at present."

For several minutes the Deadwood nabob made no reply.

"Is the sleuth still to be fought?" suddenly questioned Shasta.

"Heavens! yes!" cried Talbot, starting up. "He is to be crushed—he and his right bower—and flung to the vultures of the gold hills."

"And the robber, too?"

"And the robber also, though a woman. You have recovered from the detective's charge, and of course you burn for vengeance."

"I want to pay him back."

"I thought so. But I want a hand in the finish. I want to make the New York ferret feel that Talbot of Deadwood can crush effectually. Let me go back. You say you tracked him first from Fortune's Folly?"

"We did."

"What was his business there?"
 "He was alone in the room above the bar."
 "How long did he occupy it?"
 "Duke says about an hour."
 "What did he find there?"
 "I do not know."
 "You have been in that room, Shasta?"
 "Yes."
 "It contains Jacinto Jack's wardrobe. A few clothes, half a dozen collars and some buttons."

"Well, something important took Captain Coldgrip thither. He may have found a prize, or found nothing."

The big sport nodded.
 "You will go back to the trail. There must be no more charges by a horse ridden by the man who has crossed the States to play a hand against us here in Deadwood. I shall not turn all the band loose on the hunt; I want no hue and cry. I know the cunning, the coolness of the man we are dealing with. You need no instructions, Shasta."

When Colonel Cupid had dismissed the Black Hills sport, and stood once more in the room which had been plundered, he gave vent to his anger in a volley of hot words. Then he restored the papers to the safe which had been opened without injury.

"What is this?" cried he, discovering that the lock worked as well as usual. "There was no violence here. My safe is picked as by an old hand. The woman story I don't like. It is unreasonable. A woman with a hidden face, hey? By Jove! there was collusion here. Where is the rascal, Nolan?"

The Deadwood nabob sprang back and rushed from the room.

Beyond it and up a flight of steps, was the apartment occupied by young Nolan, the servant.

He burst into it with a tiger-like bound.
 "Nolan, I want the solemn truth!" exclaimed Talbot.

There was no reply, and the gold king found himself in an empty room.

"The young rascal has run away!" he went on. "What has he left for me?" and he pounced upon a bit of paper lying on a table at the window.

Striking a match on the wall, Colonel Cupid read the following sentences:

"Your look has accused me, but before Heaven I am innocent. I have confessed that I was surprised, but it is not enough. You can find a better servant than I have been, and, with thanks for a thousand favors in the past, I leave your employ and Deadwood forever."
 NOLAN."

"Let the scamp go!" vociferated Talbot, tearing up the paper and flinging the fragments from him. "He leaves under a cloud of suspicion, notwithstanding the declaration he calls on Heaven to witness. Some of these days I will show him that I never forget treachery, but just now I have bigger game to look after."

While the Deadwood Croesus read the note left behind by the fugitive servitor, two men on horseback halted in the suburbs of the mountain city.

"I think we will play the next hand here," said one.

"I am willing. I tell you I want to keep my word to Colonel Cupid. He will not be so eager to keep his to me."

"Of course not."

"Ah, captain, if you had come an hour sooner!"

"We would not be here now, think you, Sam?"

"If we were, we would have a prisoner elsewhere. The girl is yonder—where her father died. One of these days she will go out on the trail—a female avenger. They are the most dangerous of all, you know. You have not forgotten Lucia and her oath."

"No. I wonder where she is?"

"Lying in ambush maybe. I don't like the thought of having a woman against us. Colonel Cupid knows she is here, for he denied all knowledge of her even after she was seen to quit his house. Shall we see Coralie first?"

"Yes."

The two men rode on.

In a little while they reached the vicinity of Mad Barton's home.

A light was visible beyond the windows, the curtains of which were drawn.

One of the two slipped from the saddle, and the other took the lines he dropped.

A minute later a young girl, going through a lot of papers under a light, heard a low rap at the door.

She thrust the documents into a tin box, which she deposited in a secret niche in the wall, and then answered the knock.

The man at the door walked in without an invitation, and Coralie stepped back with a strange look for his coolness.

"Pardon me," he said, with a smile that disarmed her fears. "There are times when one gets singular visitors. Give me ten minutes' audience. It is important."

A look of recognition overspread Coralie's face.

"You must be the man I want to see," she

exclaimed. "You can be none other than Captain Coldgrip, the great detective."

The man's eyes twinkled—reply enough for the girl who watched him.

"What do you want to know?" she went on.

"You will find me willing to tell you all."

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE POINT OF A DAGGER.

CAPTAIN COLDGRIP had come back to Deadwood, and Coralie, who regarded him steadily, for she met him now for the first time, thought she could see that he had returned for a deep move in the game.

The offer made in her last words was bold and without reserve.

Was she really willing to give up the secret of the lost mine—a secret which she had refused to surrender when her father stood before the leveled pistols of Xerxes and his fellow-outlaws?

She waited for the detective to proceed.

"Tell me first about your father's death," Captain Claude said.

"Do you want the shooting among the mountains?"

"Not that so much. He died at home."

"In this room."

"Alone?"

Coralie started a little.

"No, not alone," she replied. "I heard his last words."

"You, Coralie?"

"Yes."

"I thought— But go on," with a wave of the hand.

"I was of the opinion, but not for long, that father was dead when Leon Talbot confronted me on my return from seeking surgical aid. So thought the Deadwood Croesus himself. I undeceived him afterward."

"Ha! you told him that your father spoke to you after his departure?"

"I did. I had to do so to emphasize the demand I made on him."

"What was that?"

Coralie hesitated, but her recollection of the promise to keep nothing back urged her on.

"When Colonel Cupid left the house he carried away the last work of father's hands. It was the gold plot. The ink on it was hardly dry."

"And you told him this openly and boldly, girl?"

"Yes."

"What did he say?"

"Get the map if you can!"

A quiet smile was visible on the New York ferret's countenance.

"He went away with this, did he?"

"He did."

"Now, Coralie, you can answer my next question, or keep silent, just as you wish. Do you hold the secret which cost your father his life?"

The reply was prompt.

"I hold it."

"Entire?"

"I think so."

"Could you, if desired, reproduce the bonanza plot?"

"I could try," Coralie answered, with a smile.

Captain Coldgrip drew from his pocket a document which he unfolded in the young girl's sight.

"Ah! you have a duplicate of father's map," she exclaimed, starting forward.

"Not quite. This map is lame in several important particulars. It will baffle the best mine-hunter on earth. Look at it."

The detective pushed the plot across the table, and Coralie studied it attentively some time.

"Do you see where it is deficient?" asked Captain Claude.

Coralie looked up.

"They say that you are the paid man of a syndicate," she remarked, looking him in the eye.

"Who says this?"

"Father always thought so, and Leon Talbot believes it. It is said that when you find the Lost Angel bonanza, you will turn it over to your employers."

"In other words, Coralie, I am but a hired man, eh?"

"Yes."

"To you the truth, girl. I am no man's man in this hunt! It is true that there exists in New York a syndicate of millionaires who want to find the hidden mine; it is true that they flatter themselves I am in their employ, and true also is it that I left the Atlantic city for the lost veins of ore. But my mission is a two-fold one, as the Deadwood nabob suspects tonight. Have I answered you?"

"I am satisfied," and Coralie returned to the gold plot on the table.

"I possess a memory which to me is wonderful," she continued. "I once saw father's plot, and its lines and stars are burned into my brain as it were. Your map, Captain Coldgrip, needs a line here," the girl's tapering finger moved across the paper. "This mark should be extended to these two crosses, and then a half circle drawn up here, like this."

"I see it all now!" ejaculated Captain Claude. "Without your additions, I might have hunted all my life for the Lost Angel."

"Can you find it now?"

"Why not? Where your are stops lies the prize."

The girl looked down at her map.

"I have not betrayed him. No!" she thought. "In giving up the secret he cherished, I put it into the hands of a man who will not let Blake Barton's daughter want. And he is hunting down a dangerous criminal while he seeks the portals of the lost bonanza. The dead would not upbraid me if the tongue could speak."

Captain Coldgrip took possession of the plot, and with a gratified look at Coralie transferred it to his pocket.

"You have the thanks of Captain Claude," said he.

"With this map I am fully armed."

"You are in Deadwood."

"Which is the home of the Monte Cristo of Dakota?"

"Yes—the abode of the man whose captains are some of the most desperate men of the West. I have seen them all."

"All, Coralie?"

"Every one."

"There is one man who comes only in the night."

"White Beard?" asked the girl, smiling.

"That is the man."

"I have seen him, too."

"What is his voice like?"

"He cannot talk."

The singular expression which came into the detective's eyes at this was caught by the watchful girl.

"I have given you a clew," she exclaimed. "Wait! I will give you another."

She left the table and went to the closed niche in the wall from which, after pressing a button, she took the tin box she had placed there on the sleuth's arrival.

Bearing it to the table, she unlocked it, and took out a packet well wrapped in paper.

"Father brought this from New York," she resumed, handing the packet to the detective. "Open it, Captain Claude."

The Atlantic ferret bent over the table and loosened the several wrappings of twine.

All at once something dropped from his hands, and Coralie, who was watching closely, uttered a light cry.

"Look! the point of a dagger!" she said, pointing at the triangular bit of steel that lay on the cloth.

Captain Coldgrip picked it up curiously and held it in the light.

"You have seen it before, Captain Claude," remarked the girl, noticing his expression.

"No, but I think I can supply the remainder of the blade."

He went back to the packet from which the point had fallen.

"There is a picture," and he placed a photograph beside the steel.

"The man and his dagger-point, are they not?"

Coralie looked up at the Atlantic sleuth as she spoke.

"Do you know the man?"

A white hand crossed the table and took up the picture.

"It is White Beard. It can be no other! The beard is not here, Captain Claude; but the eyes—the eyes! This man is White Beard, the mute who comes to see Leon Talbot, but always at night."

"You would make a good detective, miss," answered the spotter without confirming Coralie's guess.

"I have no taste for the profession, but I cannot help recognizing this man."

"Is there nothing else in the packet?" asked Captain Claude. "Ha! a bit of paper-clipping dated nearly four years back."

He looked at the cutting for a moment, and then handed it over to Coralie.

"It is an item concerning the mysterious killing of Cyrus Blonden!" she cried. "You ought to know something about it. My father tried to set you on the assassin's track."

"Your father, Coralie?"

"Blake Barton."

"Then he was the mysterious man who offered ten thousand dollars for the murderer of Blonden. He baffled me at every turn, and while I remained on the trail, I never could find out who the would-be-avenger was."

"It was my father. He was Blonden's best friend, but for some reason which he sedulously concealed from me, he never let it be known that he was the person who set the detectives after the Blonden mystery."

"If he could hear my voice to-night, Coralie, he would know that I am still on that strange trail of city crime," answered Captain Claude. "You see he has given me two links for the chain—the photograph and broken point. I feel like taking his dead hand and thanking him."

The New York sleuth put the three articles together and tied them up as they had been delivered to him by Coralie.

"They are yours," she cried, refusing the

packet with a gesture. "By the authority of my father I give them into your keeping."

"By his authority, do you say?"
 "Yes. They are bequeathed to you in the will I found to-day in this tin box. Why he kept so long these links in the chain of evidence I cannot say, and the dead speak not. But White Beard now is not the man the picture shows," quickly continued the prospector's daughter.

"I know not what fetches him to Deadwood between the days. If there is a chain between him and Colonel Cupid, and there must be, for his time here is passed under the nabob's roof, it is one of strength and mystery."

"It is more than that—the word of Claude Coldgrip for it, girl!" emphasized the detective. Coralie, gazing into his eyes, did not speak.

"Well, to the tussle," he went on, rising from the table.

"You are going to strike?"

"I shall find and hold!"

"Beware! Let the child of Barton warn you. You fight the entire power of Leon Talbot."

"It has been against me all along."

"But you are in the net now. This is Deadwood. Forget it not."

"Thanks, my girl."

He went to the door, touching his hat to the observing Coralie, and laid his hand on the knob.

A moment later he recoiled.

"The trap has been sprung!" exclaimed the prospector's child.

At that instant the door flew open, and startled Coralie Barton saw a dozen men file into the room.

They were citizens of Deadwood, for the most part men of almost gigantic physiques.

Coralie knew them all.

"We have an unpleasant duty to perform," said the leader of the crowd, facing the detective whom the whole set had already singled out. "We must place you under arrest."

Coralie could hardly suppress a cry.

Under arrest!—The sleuth from New York?

Not a muscle of the detective's face moved.

"What is the charge, gentlemen?" he asked.

"Murder. We arrest you, Captain Coldgrip, for the murder of Jacinto Jack!"

"Ah!" cried Coralie, under her breath. "The hand of the Deadwood nabob is in this!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE BREATH OF A MOB.

ARRESTED for murder!

If the Atlantic detective saw a deep scheme in the move, he made no sign.

The men who had entered the house waited quietly for his response to the charge, and when he walked toward their leader and surrendered calmly they exchanged glances of astonishment.

Coralie looked on amazed.

She could not conceive how a charge of this nature could keep back the detective's indignation.

Why was he silent?

In her mind it was not even possible that he was guilty.

No, he could not be.

"I am ready, gentlemen," the New York sleuth remarked, without answering the accusation, and then with a glance at the girl as he reached the door, he continued. "We will see what there is in this," and was gone.

"May all your villainy come to naught, Leon Talbot!" exclaimed Coralie. "I see your hand in this work, though I am surprised that the Marshal of Deadwood should lend his aid, since your scheming swamped the mine he owned less than a year ago. Well, your wealth is all-powerful, and it may have healed the marshal's heart."

Meantime, Captain Coldgrip, under guard, was being marched to the city jail, a stout and ungainly affair with doors that bore the scars of several desperate mountain mobs.

He had looked for Sunshine Sam whom he had left with the horses outside of Barton's house, but his right bower was not to be seen.

Had he been pounced upon unawares and made way with before the arrest?

"It is done," said a man entering Talbot's presence a few moments after the arrest.

"Without a struggle?"

"He never kicked."

"Was he found at Coralie's house?"

"Yes."

"Alone with the girl?"

"Alone with her."

"What does Deadwood say?—Have you felt its pulse?"

"It is going up," answered the nabob's visitor with a grin. "The town doesn't like Yankee detectives anyhow, and the pulse of the community can be thrown up to one hundred without much of an effort."

"Have it done, Shasta! By Jupiter! this is the quickest play for big stakes I have ever made. You know how to work? I am to be merely a witness if it comes to regular proceedings—if it comes to this, understand me."

The nabob's lieutenant bowed.

"I want you here till the crisis is passed," continued the millionaire. "We will let the

plunderer of the safe go for the present; the trail-dog from New York demands attention now. Jove! but it was a lucky discovery you made as you were preparing to get out of town. A word to the wise was sufficient, eh, Shasta?"

Shasta Sam gave Talbot a smile for the expression.

"Go to the next play now. We must wrap cords of doom about this man. With Coralie, was he? You don't know what passed between them?"

"I do not, colonel."

"Never mind; we need not care to know. Jacinto Jack is a power to us at this time. Circulate among the people, Shasta. Tap the banks and drop seed here and there as you think best."

Then Colonel Cupid was alone, but not for long.

Shasta Sam could not have been far from the house when the Deadwood money-king looked up from his chair into the face of a handsome man whose white beard fell down over his bosom like a mass of silver thread.

Talbot held out his hand which was heartily grasped, but not a word passed between the two men.

As the stranger dropped into the empty chair at the nabob's side, he drew forth a mute's tablet and wrote rapidly thereon for a second.

"What has happened? I saw the marshal and his posse take a man to prison," Talbot read.

"You were right," the nabob wrote in reply.

"A man called Captain Coldgrip has just been arrested for murder."

The white-bearded man took in the answer at a glance, and then fell back and stared at Talbot.

"In heaven's name, when did he come to Deadwood?" he returned by means of the tablet, and he wrote as if his veins were on fire.

"A few days ago."

"Is he alone?"

"He is now," was the significant reply.

"For the murder of whom has he been arrested?"

"For the killing of Jacinto Jack—the Deadwood dandy. There is danger of mob law," and Talbot smiled on the person who ran over his words as the pencil formed them.

"You want it that way, don't you, Leon?"

The nabob nodded.

The man who had come looked past sixty, but his figure was that of a person twenty years younger. He had expressive eyes of a dark gray, but in them was the look of the man whose tongue is forever silent.

White Beard, the strange mute, was closely connected with Leon Talbot by a chain of some kind.

Not many people in Deadwood had seen him, for his visits were always made at night, and while he remained in town he was closeted in the nabob's house.

His first coming did not take place until after Talbot had been a year among the Black Hills, and had firmly established himself.

It was evident that the two men had met before, and somewhere far from the Dakota gold fields.

"How does he look?" asked White Beard on the tablet after Talbot's last reply.

"You would know him at sight."

"Can he be on the old trail yet?"

"He says he wants to find the Lost Angel."

White Beard grinned, but his countenance soon relapsed into seriousness, and then he wrote again:

"You don't want this man to escape from the toils. He may be hunting the lost bonanza, but that is not his real mission to the Black Hills. What is your plan to hold him?"

"There will be a mob at the jail within the coming hour."

"Who will lead it?"

"It will take care of itself."

White Beard looked pleased and drummed on the table a moment with his pencil.

"Where was the detective captured?" he wrote.

"At mad Barton's house," and then Talbot looked at the mute to note the effect of his reply.

"There?" was the answer. "He did not find the girl at home."

The Deadwood nabob started.

"The deuce he didn't!" he said to himself, then he had recourse to the pencil again.

"You must be mistaken," he made it say.

White Beard shook his head.

"I met a woman riding out of town as I came in. I took her for Miss Coralie, but the light was not good."

"That was the woman who plundered me!" grated Talbot.

"Which road was she on?"

The last sentence was the one he put on the tablet.

"She was taking the south trail."

"I'll recollect that," thought the nabob.

The following moment he left his chair and went to the door.

Three stalwart fellows in dark hats and shirts confronted him. They saluted simultaneously.

"There's going to be a mob," said one.

"Where?"

"At the jail. Deadwood is getting its blood

up. The whole town wants vengeance for Jacinto Jack."

"What does the arrested person say?" asked Talbot with eagerness.

"Not a word that we've heard. I guess they've got evidence enough to convict him on trial, but they say, 'what's the use of a hearing dragging itself along a day or so?' He has been in the room where Jacinto's effects are stored, and Custer Charley of Fortune's Folly has admitted that he even searched the chest."

"That's against him," remarked Talbot.

"Of course. We meant to know if we must talk against the general verdict, or let things drift along. We belong to you, you know."

The three men were the bosses of three of his mines, and had simply come to the nabob for instructions.

"I have nothing in this affair," answered Talbot adroitly. "I never interfere with justice."

That was answer enough, and the miners saluted and withdrew.

"The heaven is working," wrote Talbot on the mute's slate when he went back to the table. "There will be no New York sleuth-hound at the end of the hour."

The gray eyes got a pleasant expression.

Ten minutes later the Deadwood gold-bug was called to the door again.

This time but one man greeted him.

"Well, Bradford, what is it?" he said.

"They would like to have you, sir, at the Gold Brick Hotel."

"Who wants me?"

"The Committee o' Safety."

"What's up?"

"They want to get the man who killed Jacinto Jack from the jail."

"Who does—the committee?"

"Jehul! no! Why, five hundred men are in the street near the building. It is the biggest mob Deadwood ever saw. Unless the committee get the upper hand soon, the jig is up with the prisoner. What shall I say?"

The Deadwood gold-bug hesitated.

"They requested me to tell you to be prompt, colonel."

"I'll come."

"At once?"

"At once."

The man went back.

Colonel Cupid returned to the man with the white beard and wrote:

"Called out for a spell. I won't help the Yankee spotter one jot. Have no fears; his doom is sealed."

"I guess he knows ere this that Leon Talbot can turn on a snake and crush it!" cried the young millionaire, hastening down the street.

The Gold Brick Hotel stood near the jail, and Talbot was about to enter it when a hand touched his arm.

"Don't encourage the committee, who want time," whispered a voice at his ear. "Play with them ten minutes, and the lynchers will be inside."

Talbot looked over his shoulder as the voice ceased, and saw the disappearing face of Shasta Sam.

"Ten minutes, eh?" he mentally exclaimed as he crossed the threshold of Phenix Eagle hostelry. "I'll dally with the committee an hour if the mob proves a little slow," and then he entered a room containing half a dozen men.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE NABOB'S SUCCESS.

COLONEL CUPID'S wealth and position made him one of the most conspicuous citizens of Deadwood.

He was one of the organizers of the Committee of Safety, which consisted of seven men, noted for their coolness on trying occasions.

This committee was almost autocratic.

One can nearly say that it carried the power of life and death in its hands.

When Leon Talbot entered the little room of the Gold Brick Hotel, he was received with looks of satisfaction.

He took a seat at the table around which his six associates were gathered.

"We were reluctant to disturb you, colonel," said one of the men. "But you see we were compelled to."

"Yes, and we have but ten minutes in which to decide the fate of a man who may be innocent," remarked another, glancing from his watch to the window, a few yards beyond which hundreds of angry men were crying for the blood of a person separated from them by a pair of jail doors.

"Must it be done in that time?" asked Talbot.

"The mob out yonder have promised to hold off that long. Men with ready revolvers, iron bars, and hammers are counting the seconds. I have been in Deadwood since its birth, but the crowd outside is the worst that ever thronged its streets."

"What are the circumstances?"

Having put the question, Talbot took a cigar from a case and leaned back, smoking complacently.

"I'll eat that ten minutes up in parley," he thought. "Shasta Sam will do his duty outside."

"We can't go over the whole affair—time is too precious for that," answered one of the committee. "The man in the city jail is called Claude Coldgrip; he is said to be a detective. The charge against him is murder—the victim Jacinto Jack, found dead on the south trail, as you may recollect. The proof is not much yet, but enough, I fear, to stir up the lynching proclivities of a mob. I am unwilling to let the crowd out there have its way. The prisoner says but little. He intimates that he has been arrested at the instigation of an enemy, and says he can prove his innocence at any time."

The speaker talked fast, with an open watch ticking on the table before him.

"Where is the prisoner from?" queried Talbot.

Several members of the committee showed their chagrin at such frivolity.

"He is a New York man," replied some one.

"Looking up somebody among us, eh?"

"I do not know."

Just then there came several taps from the window, and a face, half bearded and dark, was pressed against the pane.

"Time all gone but four minutes. So they say out here. You had better hurry up. The crowd is getting more desperate. The men with the hammers have stepped to the front!"

Every man in the room heard these words.

"They won't take advantage of our deliberations," Talbot observed with a smile. "We need not hurry up matters just because a lot of fellows outside are making fools of themselves. When did this man Coldgrip come to Deadwood?"

"We are not here to try him now, gentlemen," retorted a man across the table. "Colonel Talbot may underrate the passions of the mob in the street if he wants to, but I tell you that unless we decide the question of life and death within four minutes, you will hear the sledges on the jail doors."

"Not four minutes but two, major," corrected the man who had a watch before him.

"My God! is the time that near up? Then, I move that we declare the prisoner, Claude Coldgrip, held for regular trial for the killing of Jacinto Jack. Gentlemen, are you ready?"

"Wait!"

The voice was the Deadwood millionaire's.

All eyes were instantly turned upon him.

"I would like to know first who swore out the warrant."

"There was none. The marshal made the arrest on suspicion."

"Did the prisoner resist?"

Another tap on the window, and the same face there as before.

"One minute yet, gentlemen. You have to hurry up if—"

The sentence was not finished for the man disappeared as if somebody had jerked him away.

"Colonel Talbot objects no longer," exclaimed the leader of the committee. "All of you who favor holding the prisoner—"

"One moment, gentlemen," interrupted the gilded villain.

"The boys outside aren't half as mad as they pretend to be. If we hold this man, when shall he be tried?"

"We'll settle that afterward," cried several of the committee.

"We might as well fix the time now."

The next second a loud yell came in from the street, then a chorus of them, and fifty voices wild with passion were heard shouting "time up!" "The man belongs to us!" "Open the hammer chorus!"

Colonel Cupid knocked the ashes from his cigar with exasperating coolness, and did not seem to hear the tumult which appeared to rattle the window.

All at once, mingling with the pandemonium of mountain mob fury, came in the sounds of heavy blows!

"The hammers!" cried a man, springing up.

"Gentlemen, we are too late."

Louder and louder grew the tumult in the street, and again and again the hammers smote the doors of the jail.

It was music in Leon Talbot's ears.

"Haven't you decided yet?" shouted a man, who flung open the door in front of the nabob and confronted the awe-stricken committee.

"You ought to give that man a chance. Mebbe he didn't finish Jacinto Jack, and he ought to have a show. They pulled me away from the window awhile ago, but I'm back to say that I'm for justice. By Jupiter! there's not a particle of it in the blows of them heavy hammers."

"We can't help it now," spoke Colonel Cupid, and in his voice there was a vein of intense delight. "We know that we must not interfere with a Deadwood mob when it is at work. It is only one life, anyhow."

The man in the doorway flushed.

"You can stand thar, Colonel Talbot, and say 'only one life' with safety, but it would be otherwise if you war the man behind the jail doors!" he cried.

The Deadwood gold prince turned coldly from the man, and coolly picked up his hat.

He had gained his point, and it gave him

secret joy to think that Captain Coldgrip was at the mercy of a mob of five hundred toughs.

Suddenly a voice sounded through the room.

"Where is the Committee of Safety? They told me it was in session in this hotel," were the words the seven heard.

"In thar, miss, but they won't hear you."

Following the answer came the sound of quick footsteps, and then the figure of a young girl appeared to the men.

Leon Talbot's eyes saw her at once.

"Coralie!" he muttered. "I've been expecting her, but she comes too late."

For one moment the prospector's daughter seemed to shrink from the room she had just found; but as if the renewed blow of the mob's sledges spurred her on, she sprung toward the council.

"In God's name, I ask if you are going to let the prisoner die like a wolf in a trap?" she cried. "You have not turned him over to the fury of Deadwood's demons, I hope. The man is innocent. He is the victim of a scheme which would throw him into the clutches of the mob. You can't afford to sanction this murder. Is it true that you durst not give him a chance to defend himself?"

There was no reply.

"Listen! You bear the hammers wielded by men who know not why they are beating down the doors of the jail," suddenly continued Coralie. "Yet you stand before me like statues. Is this the Committee of Public Safety? If Captain Coldgrip falls before the tigers thirsting for his blood, you cannot call yourselves guiltless."

The beautiful speaker did not wait for a reply, and almost before the last word had ceased to sound, she was out of the room.

There was then a hasty adjournment of the committee.

"It takes them an age to hammer down two doors," thought Talbot, as he passed from the hotel, and heard the mob at work a few yards away.

Looking across the street, which was almost a square in front of the hotel, he saw the dark body of the determined crowd.

He was the only person on the porch, and in order to get a better view of the proceedings of the moonlight, he advanced to one of the columns that supported it.

At that moment he heard a crash, and then a series of victorious shouts.

"They're inside at last!" he exclaimed.

"That's just whar they are, colonel."

Talbot whirled and looked up.

Before him sat the figure of a man in a saddle, and while he stared it leaned toward him.

"They've got another door yet, haven't they?" queried this person.

"Yes, but it won't hold out three minutes."

"Can it resist two?"

"Possibly."

"I guess that is all the time I want. Colonel, you'll excuse me, but I've got to play my hand without gloves."

Quick as a flash following the announcement, the right hand of the speaker darted at the Deadwood millionaire, and he was in a clutch that had the merciless powers of eagle talons.

"Be docile, colonel," continued the man on horseback as the nabob was dragged from the porch and forced across the saddle. "You have played your game, now let me have a chance."

"What do you intend doing?"

"Nothing much, Leon Talbot," laughed the captor. "I am going to swap you to your minions for Captain Coldgrip, the man in jail. If they refuse to trade I shall blow your brains out in their presence! I think you know me now. I am Sunshine Sam, the pard of the New York sleuth and I'm generally on hand when men of your stamp don't want me around. Come! we are off," and he rode toward the jail, a cocked revolver in his left hand.

CHAPTER XXVI.

MAN FOR MAN.

CORALIE going home from the hotel after her ineffectual attempt to enlist the Committee of Safety in Captain Coldgrip's favor, had noticed a man on horseback not far from the building.

He appeared to be watching the hotel while he listened to the hammers of the Deadwood mob.

The young girl thought him a picket stationed where he was by the lynchers, and with a glance at him, she hastened on.

If she had known that the man was Sunshine Sam and that he was watching for Talbot, she might have accosted him.

"Your fellows who pounced upon me in front of Mad Barton's house did not conduct me to a safe cage," Sam said, looking down into the face of the man he held in front of him on the horse. "They took me to one of your mines, expecting it to hold me until they settled with Captain Claude, but you see I'm here, colonel. The mines can't hold any better than the Devil's Basin."

There was no reply.

The horse was moving across the square to the jail, in front of which several fires blazed, rendering the place almost as light as day.

A large crowd surged back and forth about

the very steps of the assaulted building, the front doors of which had been beaten down.

All at once a loud voice rung out over the crowd.

"Hello, there! Attention, men of Deadwood. Wheres your captain?"

Those on the outside of the crowd saw the speaker, and the few who stepped toward him drew back as they took in the situation.

In a moment, as it were, the crowd faced the other way, and the jail was at its back.

"Bring forward your captain," resumed Sunshine Sam, looking down at the upturned faces. "Who is at the head of the mob? Call your men from the jail."

"Thar's no partic'lar leader," said some one.

"Yes, there is. I've seen mobs before to-night. Gentlemen, if your captain isn't before me within a minute, I'll kill the man I hold, and drop him at your feet."

Then half a dozen voices shouted out:

"Call Maverick this way."

A smile of victory came to the spy's lips, and he soon caught sight of a man for whom the crowd made way as he came forward.

He was the ideal of a mountain Vigilante, and Sunshine Sam did not have to look twice to tell himself that Maverick, as he was called, was the head of the wild mob.

He was the man through whom Shasta Sam had worked up the nabob's scheme against Captain Coldgrip, and he could not have found a man more to his purpose.

Maverick advanced, with his eyes fastened on the spy, coolly waiting for him in the saddle.

"Well, what is it?" he asked, halting near the horse and looking up into Sam's face; but he saw at the same time the nabob's peril.

"I want the prisoner," was the response.

"Not the man who killed Jacinto."

"The man in jail; there is but one."

"That's asking a good deal," smiled Maverick. "You mean to enforce your demand, I presume?"

"I will give man for man. You see whom I hold at the muzzle of my revolver. Colonel Talbot will be released when you have fully answered me. Heaven knows I don't want the life of your nabob. I only want the man who asks a chance to prove his innocence. If Captain Coldgrip killed Jacinto Jack, and you prove it on a trial, I won't step between sentence and death. Fair play, gentlemen."

The captain of the Deadwood mob heard a Babel of sounds at his back.

The soberer ones were talking conservatively, but others were counseling resistance in heated words.

A few feet away and from where he could signal Maverick, on whom so much depended, stood Shasta Sam.

The sudden coup of Sunshine's had more than startled him.

He saw the six-shooter within two inches of Colonel Cupid's head, and the set features of the spy told him that trifling would only hasten a tragedy.

"Mebbe the prisoner wouldn't come up for trial," Maverick said to Sunshine Sam after a look from Shasta.

"He will."

"Then, we'd better keep him where he is."

"For mob number two?" was the quick response. "You won't give man for man, I see. Colonel, they don't think much of you in Deadwood."

The last sentence was addressed to Talbot, but the crowd heard every syllable.

"What does he say?" queried Maverick, taking another step toward Sam and his prisoner.

"I can't help myself," growled the millionaire turning his head to the captain of the mob.

"Do you mean liberty for the man in jail?"

"You see the fix I'm in."

Maverick was seen to grind his teeth.

"We've got to do it for the colonel's sake," he said, facing the men at his back. "This ar' one o' the time when a single man bluffs a whole town. Who is thet galoot, and whar's he from?"

Shasta Sam left his place and rushed his way to Maverick who was marching sullenly toward the jail.

"You've let him beat you, eh?" whispered the nabob's lieutenant, appearing at the rich leader's elbow.

"I couldn't help it. He's got the colonel in a tight box."

Sam growled out an oath.

"Deadwood downed by one man! I'm goin' ter emigrate."

Maverick shook the big sport off and kept on.

The disappointed crowd closed in behind him.

"You're fools if you let the bird out alive," hissed Shasta Sam ere he turned away, and there were several responses that made his eyes snap with delight.

The jail doors were guarded by the men whose hammers had battered them in.

They looked like giants as they stood there with the firelight on their faces, and muscled arms bare to the shoulders.

"Is it surrender?" they asked Maverick in sullen tones.

"I guess it's got ter be, boys."

"How many 's against us?"

"One man."

"Only one?"

"Yes, but he's got Colonel Cupid across the saddle, and there's a six-shooter at his head."

"The deuce there is!"

For all this the stalwart guards did not want to draw back and let their leader in.

Sunshine Sam had followed with his sharp eyes the progress of Maverick. He saw the crowd close in behind him, and knew what that meant.

"I shall give Captain Maverick two minutes in which to turn over the prisoner," he suddenly exclaimed. "Colonel Talbot here has signified his willingness to turn him out with his word for his bond."

There were scores of fierce looks, but not a word in reply.

"Get behind the fellow," whispered Shasta Sam to a group of men. "Leave the crowd at the right hand side. Get over toward the hotel where the light isn't so strong. Then send a bullet through his head."

Before the first movements looking to a play of this kind could be made, two members of the Committee of Safety appeared on the scene.

Sunshine Sam had arrested the fury of the mob and given the committee a breathing spell.

"We can't afford to lose Colonel Talbot," cried one of the men, who instantly received a look from Shasta Sam. "The committee pledges that the prisoner shall be tried for the murder of Jacinto Jack."

"When? when?"

"Within forty-eight hours."

The crowd separated, and once more there was a lane extending to the jail.

The two members of the committee marched down and met Maverick and the Marshal of Deadwood at the door.

Captain Coldgrip stood between them.

"You understand the situation," observed one of the men, addressing the detective. "Your man out there pledges you for trial."

"I confirm the pledge," was the prompt response. "When Deadwood calls the case against me I will answer in person."

"If it should be within forty-eight hours?"

"Yes, in three."

The next minute five men walked down the living lane.

Every eye saw the handsome figure of Captain Coldgrip, to the utter exclusion of his guards.

"It is too late for this time," muttered Shasta Sam. "I have heard of people coming in the nick of time, but this is one of the cases that beat the record."

He saw the New York detective conducted to the man who watched him from the saddle of the steed in the square.

"Here is your man!" exclaimed Maverick, releasing the sleuth and looking into Sunshine's face.

"And here is yours. Good-night, colonel," and the figure of the Deadwood nabob dropped to the ground in front of the little group.

"When I am wanted I will be here," and Captain Claude turned from the members of the safety committee to the man of millions:

"I shall not come to the trial unarmed," he went on, catching the nabob's eye. "Recollect that the murderer of Jacinto Jack is to be punished. If I am the man, Colonel Talbot, let me be strangled by the tribunal that hears the charges."

Then, in face of the crowd, he stepped to the horse's head and touched his hat to all.

"Come," he continued, to Sunshine Sam. "These gentlemen will want us soon enough, I suspect."

He turned his back deliberately upon the sullen mob, and Sam rode slowly away with the rescued man at his side.

For a moment a dead silence prevailed, and then the rage of the baffled toughs broke forth.

In an instant Talbot was the central figure of a wild crowd, and twenty men were calling at once for vengeance.

Not far from the scene stood Shasta Sam taking it all in with a gleam of wickedness in his eyes.

"The colonel may thank his stars that they traded him for Captain Coldgrip," said he, "but the pards of Deadwood would sooner see him dead whar he stands than let the Yankee spotter walk away."

"And so they would."

"The fool would have traded corpse for corpse. I saw that by his eye," remarked the nabob to the men who surrounded him. "I promise you that within forty-eight hours you will have the New York ferret in your hands, and you won't have to batter down any doors to get at him, either."

"We want the pard, too."

"Ay, and the pard you shall have, or, rather, I will give him trick for trick. Tell me that he didn't drop Jacinto Jack on the south trail. Gentlemen, the bird in the bush will come back to the hand. And once in the hand, by heavens! he dies!"

The crowd lingered in the street, cursing, breathing vengeance, and filling the air with threats.

The Atlantic detective had slipped through their fingers, and that when they were about to crown their lawless onslaught with success.

Shasta Sam had accomplished his work well enough, and the disappointing outcome could not be charged up to him.

Leon Talbot returned to his house in the very worst of humor.

Waiting to greet him was the man he had left there—White Beard, the mysterious mute.

The old man seemed to read failure on the countenance the young nabob presented.

"You have failed?" his hand dashed across his tablet which he pushed toward Talbot.

"Don't taunt me," was the response. "I have been set back for a little while. But the man from New York is doomed as surely as though he were on the gallows."

"Was he rescued, or did the committee—"

Talbot checked the writing hand and wrote himself:

"He was rescued—by the spy he brought from the East."

White Beard fell back and stared at the Deadwood Croesus.

"A thousand devils take him!" he wrote a moment afterward.

"Five hundred nearly had him," answered Talbot with a smile, and then he threw the tablet aside to confront the man who had just appeared.

"Well, you failed!" he cried, meeting this individual gaze.

"No; the mob lacked nerve at the last moment," and Shasta Sam put his yellow hands on the table and leaned across it toward Talbot.

"What are your orders now?"

"Orders? I have none for you just now!"

CHAPTER XXVII.

SHASTA'S HUNT.

SHASTA SAM drew back and straightened.

"All right, colonel," he muttered, a peculiar smile harmonizing with the light in his eyes, and then he walked out, leaving the Deadwood nabob wondering if he had not offended his best lieutenant. "Just as you say," continued the Black Hills sport, looking back at the house from the door. "No orders for Shasta just now, eh? You can sit there and place the failure of the scheme on my shoulders if you like, Colonel Leon. There may come a time when you will want the help of your old pard against this same sleuth who was so cleverly snatched from your hands to-night. The man is as good as the master when it comes to certain plays. He has talent sufficient to beat a Deadwood mob, and talent like that isn't to be laughed at. Good-night, Colonel Talbot. If you want to throw Shasta aside, all right. But can you afford to do so? Ah! we shall see!"

There was malice in the voice that spoke thus, and the man who walked away had a haughty step which boded the millionaire's future plans no good.

Shasta Sam did not go back to the crowd still discussing the rescue and its attending incidents.

He passed near enough to it, however, to hear some of the rough sentences, and went to a small house, which he entered without ceremony.

"I'm off again," he said to a middle-aged man who was about to question him when he spoke.

"The tussle is over for the present."

"Well, who won?"

"The man who had no show an hour ago."

"The prisoner?"

"Yes, Leo."

The man looked surprised.

"How could such a thing happen, when the mob was against him, Shasta?"

"I can't explain. I am going away, I say."

"On a month's absence?"

"I cannot say."

"You usually stay that long."

"That is true. But these are parlous times, Leo."

"The colonel will need you if the New York detective, as they call him, got away."

"The colonel? ho, ho!" laughed Shasta Sam. "Yes, I think he will need somebody before I come back."

"I see. You've had words."

"No; he had them," smiled the giant sport.

"Leo, one word before I go."

"Well, Shasta."

"This man Coldgrip will come back to Deadwood. His cool-headed spy will come, too. They may not come together, but never mind that. Colonel Cupid and White Beard are together now, and, as you may suppose, they are not in the best of humor."

"Where are they?"

"At the colonel's house."

"Guarded by Nolan?"

"No. Nolan has left his master's employ."

"Ah!"

"He was suspected of a crime of which he is innocent. The colonel's safe was plundered, and a certain paper carried off."

"Despite Nolan's watchfulness?"

"Yes. A woman did the job."

"When did this happen?"

"Since sundown."

"What was the nature of the document taken?"

Shasta Sam touched the man's arm lightly as his body bent forward.

"You ought to be able to guess, Leo," he said.

"Was it the gold-map?"

"It was nothing else."

"And a woman took it! Shasta, I am astonished. I did not know that the Lost Angel had a huntress on the trail. What is she like?"

"Nolan did not know. She was masked."

For a moment there was no reply.

The man called Leo leaned back in his chair and looked up into Shasta Sam's face.

"Doesn't the colonel intend to pursue her?" he suddenly inquired.

"He understands that I am going out on her trail."

"Oho!" and Leo showed his teeth. "So you are still his trail-dog. I thought you had left his employ."

"What made you think so?"

"You have just said that you had words."

"That is nothing new between master and man," Shasta answered. "I am really going away on the female robber's trail. The colonel expects it. Why not?"

"Just as you wish," responded Leo with a faint smile. "We are to part, then—for a whole month, unless circumstances bring you back sooner. Is not that it, Shasta?"

"Yes," and the giant sport took the hand extended toward him. "Keep your eyes open while I'm away. They are going to bury mad Barton to-morrow. The girl will be chief mourner, and the young doctor won't be far off. If the Centaur comes back before I do, he will come here before he sees the colonel. I will attend to that."

"Tell me one thing, Shasta. Do you want Captain Coldgrip to succeed?"

Instantly the eyes of the big rough seemed to emit sparks of fire.

"Do I want that New York ferret to come out ahead in the Black Hills?" he exclaimed.

"What a strange question that was, Leo. No, I don't want him to succeed. He will find Shasta Sam against him and his pard to the bitter end. The success of the Yankee sleuth is my ruin and yours too, Leo."

"Then I will hate him as you do. I will look out for him if he is coming back to continue the play."

"Do so, but don't try to beat him. Leave that to others. He is to be tried within forty-eight hours for the murder of Jacinto Jack."

"If he comes back for trial."

"He will do that. You don't know this man, Leo."

"To venture back into Deadwood is to re-enter the jaws of death."

"So it looks to you."

"So it shall be for Captain Coldgrip, if he be foolish enough to come."

The answer was a laugh as Shasta Sam drew back, and the next moment he waved his hand at Leo, and went out.

"Robbed by a woman, and robbed only of the gold plot," exclaimed the occupant of the cabin. "It could not have been Coralie, for she would not have to be hunted down. She is here in Deadwood. I wonder if—No! What a fool I am. Shasta Sam took the other one from town for a purpose, and I saw by his eye that Lucia was never to get to Denver."

Already Shasta was riding from the city of the gold hills.

He went south with the starry heavens overhead, and with the wind blowing through his long, black hair.

Several miles from Deadwood he turned into a narrow trail where none but the keenest of eyes could see one, and after riding some distance over it, he dismounted and crept through a wilderness of rocks and ferns, till the darkness took his figure in.

When Shasta Sam straightened again he was in a cavern whose ceiling he could not touch with his lifted hands.

He was not alone.

On a blanket on the ground lay a man whose figure was a match for his own, and two dark eyes full of eagerness and expression were fastened on the sport.

It was Deadwood Duke, the Centaur, who had been nursing a broken arm and several bruises ever since Captain Coldgrip's charge on the two sports, and his escape.

"You have news. Tell me," exclaimed the Centaur, eagerly.

Shasta Sam narrated the last events in life in Deadwood. He gave a graphic description of the capture, the mob, and the escape.

"The crowd lacked leadership. What! was Maverick the controlling spirit? Pshaw! the man can be cowed. He was! Sunshine Sam would not have killed the colonel."

"Do you think so?"

"Certainly. Detectives don't kill men for whom they cross a continent. Why didn't you drop the ferret's spy?"

"By Jove! I almost wish I had now," muttered Sam. "But we don't drop tears into the milk on the ground. You will be able to leave here soon."

"I go to-morrow."

"Back to Deadwood?"

"Yes. The colonel knows that Captain Cold-

grip got away despite our best efforts. My arm will keep me from the trail for some time, and if the New York sleuth or his pard comes back, I'll be on hand to take a hand in the play."

"Go to Leo first. The old fellow will give you some news which you will want to hear."

"And you?"

"I am off on a mission."

"After the cool captain, eh?"

"Wait and see."

Once more the stalwart sport of Deadwood was riding through the mountains.

The Centaur had been left behind in the cavern.

By and by the arrows of dawn began to shoot skyward in the east, and not long afterward Shasta Sam was standing erect in his broad stirrups looking down the sloping trail which wound ahead.

"I can't be far from the old hut," he exclaimed. "I ought to see it from here. Ah, yonder it is, beyond doubt. The shrubbery has taken wonderful growth of late. And there are fresh hoof-tracks on this very trail! Now I will see."

He urged his steed forward until he was far below the point from which he had discovered the darkish object which he knew was a cabin nestling among a lot of wild shrubbery.

An old cabin it was, but still capable of affording shelter, and while the sport approached it a queer look grew on his face.

Every now and then he looked down at the ground over which he was riding, and saw what good eyes would not have noticed—a trail leading to that very shanty.

A few feet from the old affair Shasta Sam slid from the saddle, and left the reins on his horse's neck.

There was no door to bar him out for it had fallen in long before, and the new day was finding the nooks and crevices under the sorry roof.

In a little while Shasta Sam was leaning across the threshold of the hut.

His eyes soon singled out a horse in one corner, and in another the figure of a human sleeper on the ground.

"Hal always in luck!" muttered the sport, and then he sprang forward and bent over the sleeper.

"Here, wake up!" he cried, touching a white hand. "That was a slick trick you played on the Deadwood nabob."

There was a cry and a start, and Shasta Sam was looking into a woman's face!

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE MOUNTAIN MINE.

"MERCY! Is it you?" the woman ejaculated. "I am glad it is no one else. What did you say about Deadwood?"

Shasta laughed.

"I said it was a trick well played," he replied.

"What was?"

"Come. Don't try to hoodwink Shasta Sam, for you can't do it. I would like to know how you got at the treasure without spoiling the safe."

The woman, who was good looking, with a queenly figure, stood on the blanket that had just been her cot, and was looking into the sport's face, as if to determine whether he meant peace or war.

"How did you know I was here?" she asked.

"The trail would have guided a blind man."

The woman looked chagrined.

"Was it so bad as that?"

"Perhaps. Do you know that you gave the nabob a terrible shock?"

"Then he knows—"

"Yes. If you had held off a little while you would have found him at home. He wonders who the woman robber is, ha, ha!"

She laughed with Shasta Sam, but stopped abruptly and caught his eye.

"What has happened since?" she asked.

"They've had a mob in Deadwood."

"A mob, Captain Shasta?"

"It attempted to take your old friend Captain Coldgrip out of jail."

The woman started.

"What put him in?"

"A charge of murder."

"Did they not get him?"

"No. His right bower, Sunshine Sam, served 'em an unlooked-for trick, and walked off with the prisoner."

If Shasta had glanced downward at that moment he would have seen the woman's hands clinched.

"Will there be no pursuit?" she exclaimed.

"Who's to pursue? I am here, and the Centaur is laid up with a broken arm."

"He has other men at his command."

"Plenty of them. But Captain Coldgrip is to come back to Deadwood to stand trial."

"When?"

"To-day or to-morrow."

"I'll be there!"

"You? No, by Jupiter! You must not show up in Deadwood. Don't you know you are dead?"

"So I am," and a smile appeared at the speaker's mouth.

"Dead people don't materialize at trials, do they, Shasta?"

"No, nor anywhere else. They never rob safes, either."

"Tell me about the girl," and the woman's smile vanished for a look full of anger. "Is she back?"

"She is there."

"Did Colonel Cupid suspect her?"

"He did at first, but Nolan cleared her."

"Ah! I hate Nolan for that. And I hate the girl, too. When I came to the Black Hills I thought of nothing of this kind. I did not know I had a rival in the person of Mad Blake Barton's daughter. I have told you a good deal of the past, Captain Shasta. You know that I did Leon Talbot a great service thousands of miles from here when this same Captain Coldgrip was close at his heels. I wrecked my life to save him—to give him an opportunity to become the nabob of the Northwest. How does he reward me? He sends me away ostensibly to Denver in your charge. And your secret orders were that I should never see the Colorado city. I saw enough in his house to tell me that he was working for two results. He would find the Lost Angel Mine, and then would make Coralie his wife."

The woman's eyes fairly blazed with jealousy.

"You have imparted to me the strange oath Leon Talbot took some months ago," she went on. "He will not install any one mistress of his house until he has found the lost bonanza. He will never do it if he waits till then."

"Why not, Lucia?"

"Where is his gold plot?" laughed the woman. "It was in his safe last sunset. It is not there now."

"He is aware of that."

"Colonel Cupid's hands will never touch the map again. It does not exist."

"What do you mean, woman?" cried Shasta Sam clutching Lucia's arm. "You have not been foolish enough to destroy the plot you took from the nabob's safe?"

"Look yonder," and she pointed to some bits of burned paper on the ground. "The winds did not blow them for you to see. I burned the gold map last night, or rather this morning, for it was past midnight when I came here."

"I did not think you would do this," said Shasta Sam, turning to New York Lucia whose look indicated her feelings.

"Did you think I would keep the map until his minions found me?"

"I thought you would hide it."

"No, I destroy!" was the reply. "He will never keep his oath, for the only true map of the gold district that ever touched his fingers is ashes. You don't want me to appear at the detective's trial?"

"I do not."

"What is the evidence against him?"

"Enough to convict him by a Deadwood jury."

"Then he will not come back for trial."

"You are wrong, Lucia. You ought to have seen enough of this Captain Claude to know that nothing daunts him. He will come back to Deadwood, although one half the town thinks otherwise. Colonel Cupid and White Beard, whom I left with him, know that he will come."

"Tell me!" cried Lucia, laying one hand on Shasta's sleeve. "Tell me about this man called White Beard."

"I don't know much about him."

"Did he come to Deadwood after Leon Talbot?"

"Yes. Talbot had two mines when he came."

"Were they friends from the first?"

"They were."

"Did you ever hear White Beard talk?"

"No, nor no one else. The man is a mute."

New York Lucia did not start though the answer affected her.

"A mute? The same man! There can be no mistake," she said under her breath, then she looked at the giant sport again.

"Those two men ought to be friends," she resumed. "White Beard and Leon Talbot! A pair, I assure you. Master and man. But never mind this talk of mine, Captain Shasta. I am ready to go."

She walked to the horse in one corner of the hut and patted his sleek neck.

"You are not particular where I go so I do not return to Deadwood?" she smiled at the gold-bug's lieutenant. "I understand. You don't want Colonel Cupid to know that you made a false report when you came back from conducting me to Denver. To Denver! Ah, Captain Shasta, I thought from the first that you were not the merciless tiger men call you," and her eyes softened and beamed on the sport in a manner which caused his gaze to drop.

Half an hour later Shasta Sam held out his hand to Lucia who had ridden at his side from the mountain hut.

"There are two bands of men you want to avoid," he remarked.

"Two, Shasta?"

"Yes—the mountain toughs headed by Xerxes who ordered the execution of mad Barton, and

Colonel Cupid's rangers who will pick up any prize they find."

"I will watch for them. Do you think Coralie will attempt to take vengeance for her father?"

"She will. Woe to Xerxes if he gets in the girl's way."

Shasta Sam had accompanied the woman to the spot where he extended his hand, and having cautioned her again to keep herself secluded as much as possible, he rode back toward Deadwood having found the person whom he had sought.

But the Black Hills sport did not go direct to the gold town.

He turned from the main trail some distance from Deadwood and put spurs to his horse.

Away he went through a wild landscape, now on a trail that stretched in a straight line for some distance ahead, and now following it in and out among the hills.

It was almost noon before the Deadwood sport gave his horse rest.

He had traveled far since leaving New York Lucia, and had reached a part of the country wilder than the wildest about the Black Hills city.

He was between Deadwood and Custer, but far from the trail over which the clumsy stage rumbled at intervals.

All at once a voice commanded him to halt, and as his horse stopped Shasta Sam looked into the face of a man who until that moment had been unseen.

"How goes it, Truxton?" asked the sport as the guard saluted and smiled.

"All's well."

"That is good."

As Captain Shasta walked his steed forward the bridle-rein was taken possession of by the man, and a few yards from the place of meeting the nabob's man dismounted.

"I guess I've got the surest bonanza after all," he chuckled. "They may hunt for the Lost Angel till doomsday—Captain Coldgrip included—but I own the biggest secret west of the Mississippi. Of course I'm glad Lucia destroyed the gold plot, but I wasn't fool enough to tell her so. The idiots of Deadwood wonder where I get the money I play with when I come back to fight their tigers. They should follow me once. Ah! three fools have tried that, and three will never try again."

A few moments later Shasta Sam plunged into the mouth of a dark shaft in the side of a hill, and was gone.

Not long afterward he reappeared in a vaulted chamber well lighted by several fires.

Here and there half-naked men flitted like specters, and Shasta Sam, standing on a ledge of rock several feet from the ground floor of the cavern, looked down on the scene.

The air about him was hot and close, and the workmen every now and then drew their naked arms across their brows.

After viewing this scene for awhile the Deadwood sport passed into a smaller chamber where the air was better.

Some rude furniture gave the place the appearance of a private office, and Shasta took a rustic chair at a clumsy desk.

In a moment he was joined by a young man whose face wore a careworn expression. He laid a cocked revolver at Shasta's hand.

"There! use that on me, captain," he cried stepping back. "I deserve its contents at your hands."

Shasta looked up amazed.

"What has happened, Nadir?" he exclaimed. "Mallory has deserted!"

For a moment there was no change visible in Shasta Sam's face, but all at once his fingers closed about the butt of the weapon, and his eyes got a fierce glare.

"When did he go?" he asked.

"Last night."

"Truxton told me nothing."

"Truxton does not know."

"I told you to watch them all; but never mind, Nadir. You will die an old man if you wait till I kill you. What will Mallory do with the secret?"

"He will sell it."

"To whom?"

"I do not know, but I heard him wonder once what Colonel Cupid would pay for it."

The lips of Shasta Sam met resolutely after his overseer's reply, and he left the chair with a response which the listener knew sealed the doom of the deserter.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE SLEUTH COMES BACK.

"WHAT! that cool head come back here for trial? We'll have to catch the Yankee cop if we want to try him for the murder of Jacinto Jack. That's the hull thing in a nutshell, gentlemen, and you kin look at it only in that way."

The deliverer of this opinion leaned against the bar-room counter of Fortune's Folly, and faced a pretty tough crowd whose members had been discussing the prospects for Captain Coldgrip's return for trial.

It was the forenoon of the day after the mob's attempt, and mad Barton had just been buried.

Deadwood, therefore, was ready for the work of avenging Jacinto Jack.

The opinion just listened to by the crowd was shared by the majority, and everybody who had contributed to the sleuth's escape came in for some sharp criticism.

"It mightn't have gone well with Colonel Talbot if we hadn't let the prisoner go," ventured one of the group.

"That's the old excuse," broke out the man with his elbows on the counter, turning upon the speaker and transfixing him with a look. "That war the colonel's lookout and not ours. We wanted the New York ferret, and we shouldn't have been partic'lar how we got 'im. The committee's in session now—all excepting the colonel—but what will it do?"

"Set up things for the Yankee sleuth when he comes, likely, answered some one.

"Let it try that!" and the speaker struck the counter with his fist. "It helped him away last night. We kin depose that committee, and that's what we'll do if it carries things too far; won't we, gentlemen?"

The almost unanimous "yes" that responded was flattering to the speaker's vanity.

It had been noticed that none of Leon Talbot's men went to the mines that morning.

His three overseers, of whom a stalwart man named Bradford was the chief, circulated among the public resorts, and did not fail to keep alive the events of the past night, but more particularly the death of Jacinto Jack, the Deadwood dandy.

Talbot was not seen.

The men professed not to know where the young nabob was, but it was believed that he was keeping himself in the background while he directed progressing events.

There were but few people in Deadwood who knew that White Beard, the mute, was in town during the failure of the mob to accomplish its purpose.

If he had returned to the country beyond, it had been under cover of darkness, as all his returns had been; but the truth is that for once in a long while the silent man had not retired.

Noon came, but it did not bring the New York detective and his spy.

Feeling crystallized against him.

There were those in Deadwood who believed that the charge of murder had been trumped up against him, but they gradually went over to the other side.

In the little room at the Gold Brick Hotel six members of the Committee of Safety were arranging for the trial.

One man was missing, and that was Colonel Cupid, the nabob.

"I trust he will not come!" exclaimed Coralie to the young man who had called after the sad little burying on the mountain-side. "The man is brave to a fault almost, and now that I know what really brought him from New York, I hope he will not ride into the power of the one-sided tribunal they have instituted here. Do you think he will come?"

The question in Coralie's sad tones was full of anxiety, and she watched the young doctor closely while he seemed to make up his opinion.

"Yes, I think the man will come," was the reply. "I studied his face when he gave the promise. It meant no deception, whatever may be the prevailing opinion in Deadwood."

The girl was silent.

"If he comes you will bear him a message from me, won't you, Frank?"

"I am at your service, Coralie."

"He may come at any time, if such is really his intention. It is past noon now. You shall have the message at once."

She seated herself at the table and began to write.

"If your message is a warning, Coralie, it should be delivered verbally," he said. "A bit of paper would compromise you. A whisper entangles no one."

"No; no one but the person who is seen to deliver it," answered Coralie, with a light smile.

"You do not refuse to deliver my message?"

"No."

When she had finished, she folded her paper and handed it to her lover.

"This gets into his hands as soon as he comes," she continued. "I think it will give him another link for the chain he is forging."

"Then you are helping this man?"

"I am not deserting him."

Coralie spoke with firmness.

"You will have Deadwood against you."

"Part of it is there now. The schemes of Leon Talbot are against me. You know all about the theft of the map father drew with death at his heart-strings? You have been told that story of the nabob's villainy, how he at first denied the charge I made, and then brutally told me to get the plot if I could. That was Leon Talbot in his true light—the tiger with the velvet drawn back from his claws. Yes, this man was against my father as he is against me. He saw the opportunity of his life when he stood over the dying and watched the hand draw the map he had plotted for. He helped to kill my father almost as surely as the revolvers of Captain Xerxes and his mountain robbers. I offend Colonel Cupid if I stand by Captain Coldgrip,

do I? Then the New York detective will not be friendless in Deadwood while Coralie Barton the orphan calls it home!"

"And I will sustain you," was the prompt response. "All Deadwood is not the captain's enemy. The trail—if it takes place, will be a fair one so far as the committee can make it fair. But the outside is against him."

"You mean," exclaimed Coralie, flushing, "that Talbot and his influence will not let the trial be fair?"

"That is true."

"I see. Death and nothing else is to be the outcome if they can make it so. Again, I wish Captain Coldgrip would disappoint the crowd, yet I would not give the Deadwood scoundrels a chance to call him coward."

Coralie had barely finished when a shout came into the room, then another and another.

It was something unusual for a Deadwood afternoon, and the girl went to the window.

The next second she changed color and uttered an exclamation.

"Fortune be his shield now. He has come!" she cried.

In an instant Doctor Frank was at her side and the two young people gazed at the man who had just reined his horse in front of the Gold Brick.

Although the hotel was some distance down the street and on the side opposite the one occupied by Coralie's home, the identity of the man was placed beyond question by the gathering crowd which kept at a respectful distance while every eye regarded the person in the saddle.

"The message—as soon as possible," continued Coralie. "Slip it into his hand and let him get a glimpse of you. He knows—that we are friends. Now go, Frank, and may Heaven crown your work with success."

With a parting look and a touch of hands the young doctor of Deadwood left the house.

Coralie tarried at the window, her attention still drawn to the man who had come back contrary to the general belief.

She saw near him several men whom she recognized as members of the Committee of Safety, but beyond them was a wall of dark faces in which were set a lot of glaring eyeballs.

It would be difficult to describe the effect on the Deadwood toughs of Captain Coldgrip's return.

It was some time before they could recover from their surprise.

He had come back, had placed himself voluntarily in the hands of a court whose verdict would be dictated by the man who wanted him out of the way.

It might be a display of coolness, thought the men of Deadwood; but it was not discretion.

"Gentlemen, I await your pleasure," Captain Claude spoke, addressing the members of the tribunal of safety, who had come from the hotel to meet him.

If he saw the threatening faces of the crowd he took no note of them, and yet his fate was in their hands, and not in those of the committee.

"We have been expecting you," was the reply, which was not true, for the tribunal had given him up.

"If you are ready for trial, we can proceed at once."

"I am ready."

"Your comrade—"

"He has not been accused, therefore, he need not be here."

By this time the crowd about the New York spotter was greater than the one whose hammers had broken down the jail doors the night before.

There were the same burly figures, the same dark faces, only now they were not revealed by the firelight, but were seen in the broad light of the sun.

It was at this juncture that a man somewhat excited entered Leon Talbot's house, and surprised the Deadwood Croesus in one of the rooms.

"Well, Bradford, what news from without?"

"The man has come!"

Colonel Cupid's response was a quick start, and then his eye lit up with intense satisfaction.

"So he has kept his word?" answered the nabob. "Then, I will keep mine. Who came with him, Bradford?"

"No one."

"Left his Satanic right-bower behind for another coup, eh? Well, they can't play the old game over. The committee's decided on a struck jury of course."

"Yes."

Colonel Cupid opened a drawer in the table at his hand, and took out a folded paper.

"To Maverick," he went on, delivering the folded sheet. "I will be in at the death. That is understood. Now, do your duty."

These words were followed by a salute and the mine boss went away.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE TWELFTH JUROR.

At precisely the same time that Captain Coldgrip entered Deadwood from the south a man who did not care to be observed came in on a trail which lost itself among the hills on the West.

The two entrances formed a coincidence with which the New York detective had nothing to do.

"Now, if I can see the Deadwood Vanderbilt at once, I'll heel myself in for the future, and get away as soon as possible," the strange man said, addressing himself. "Of course, I won't find Shasta Sam here, but I don't want to be too conspicuous anyhow. I must find out where Colonel Talbot is to be found."

A force of habit or accident guided the speaker's steps to the half-open doors of Fortune's Folly, and in a little while he was drinking leisurely at the bar.

There was about this man, who was young, the look of a person who had passed a good deal of time under ground, or in the mines.

His garments bespoke the miner, and the man who attended to his wants did not give him a close look.

Fortune's Folly was scant of customers just at that time, and not long after the miner's entrance, the coming of Captain Coldgrip cleared the place of every one except the last customer.

"You don't seem to know what that man's return means?" exclaimed the bartender.

"Don't you b'long here?"

"Not right in Deadwood."

"So. Then you may not know what happened last night."

"I do not."

"Well, a prisoner was taken from the jail, but now he's come back to be hanged—like a fool. We had to let him off last night for they had Colonel Cupid in a box."

"Colonel Talbot you mean, eh?"

"It's all the same. You don't know the colonel, mebbe?"

"I'm here to see him on business, but as I'm not acquainted in Deadwood—"

"You don't know whar he lives, eh?"

"That's it."

In a minute afterward the patron of the bar received the information he was in search of, and soon Fortune's Folly had no customers.

"I must see Leon Talbot before the trial of this man," murmured the stranger. "Afterward may be too late. Mine is a bargain to be made while the sun shines."

He walked toward the crowd already gathered in front of the Gold Brick Hotel and saw the man who talked to the tribunal of safety from the saddle.

He heard the half-smothered curses of the crowd, and threats of the direct vengeance in which was breathed the name of Jacinto Jack greeted him right and left.

"The barkeeper was right," he thought. "Captain Coldgrip was foolish to come back here to stand trial before these men."

Once in the crowd, the miner from the mountains found himself held there by a force he could not throw aside.

"If Colonel Cupid war hyer, thar'd be livelier times than the committee will make if we don't push 'em," growled a man at his back.

The miner started.

"Isn't the colonel in town?" he asked.

"Guess not. Nobody's seen him since last night. But he'll be here," added the speaker, quickly. "You needn't think that he'll miss a thing o' this sort. If he isn't on hand for the trial, he won't be far off when Deadwood avenges Jacinto Jack."

"This is not very fortunate. If Colonel Cupid is not here, I must wait. Well, there'll be enough to employ me while I do so. A trial for murder, and then a hanging. That will be lively enough."

Then he saw Captain Coldgrip ride down the street escorted in a manner by the six members of the committee, and followed by the crowd determined to suppress any repetition of the last night's proceedings.

If the latest arrival had used his eyes to the best advantage possible under the circumstances, he might have discovered that he was under espionage.

Wherever he went he was followed by a man who had a beard a shade lighter than his mustache.

He had, too, the most watchful eyes one would wish to encounter, and they did not lose sight of the miner for a moment.

The afternoon was in its first quarter and Deadwood was on the street.

The detective's trial was the only topic, and the manner in which it was discussed told that the Atlantic ferret had the town against him. If there were any who hoped for acquittal—any who believed that the blood of the murdered Deadwood dandy was not on his hands, they were careful to keep the opinion to themselves.

Colonel Cupid's plot, well laid and mastered, was bearing fruit.

This sudden play which caused the arrest of Captain Coldgrip at Coralie's home was but the opening of the game.

A man with nine mines and hundreds of employees at his back is able to wield an influence which cannot be broken.

Meanwhile he kept his house where White Beard, the mute, with his tablet conversed with him and helped direct the drama going on outside.

Almost every minute messages came from

Bradford and his companions, who were on the streets. These Talbot would transfer to the slate for the mute's benefit, and would receive advice and approval in return.

At length a paper was brought to Talbot.

He ran rapidly down the list of names it contained. White Beard looked over his shoulder. The nabob held in his hand the jury destined to try the New York detective for murder.

"I don't know this twelfth man," exclaimed Talbot, looking up. "Burke Brown, eh? Who is he?"

"He came in a while ago."

"From where?"

"From the country."

"Who selected him—Captain Coldgrip?"

"No; Maverick."

"Are you sure he is the man we want?"

"The boys think so."

"Do they know that he is not the spotter's pard who was here last night?"

The dark-skinned messenger smiled.

"There's no danger of that, colonel. We're not going to try the master with his nan."

"But we want twelve men of our own on that jury!" exclaimed Talbot. "I am trusting this to you men outside. I don't know the twelfth man, Burke Brown. Was he eager to get where he is?"

"He objected strenuously. He said he was a stranger, had just come in, and all that. But he said, too, so that we heard him, that he never liked sleuths."

"He will do!" cried Talbot, throwing the paper toward the messenger. "I accept Burke Brown."

The man went off.

Thus it was that the man who came to Deadwood simultaneously with Captain Claude was selected to complete the jury by which he was to be tried.

Burke Brown's excuses were not shams.

He did not want the notoriety which the selection would give.

He had come to Deadwood on another mission.

He wanted an interview with the man of thousands, and when pressed into the service and forced to sit on the jury, he entered vigorous protests, which only tightened the coil about him.

"That holds him for a time," ejaculated the man who had watched the twelfth juror since his first appearance on the streets, and then he proceeded to a house whose tenant, a man of forty, greeted him with an exclamation of delight.

"You said you would come back before your time was up, if circumstances should warrant it, and I guess they do," said the man of the house.

"They do, Leo," was the answer. "You know what has happened. The New York ferret is back for trial, and they have completed the preliminaries. Give me a bit of news now. Has the Centaur been here?"

"He has not, Shasta."

"Where is Coralie?"

"I haven't seen the girl since she passed the window behind the corpse of her father. She must have seen the detective from her house, for he surrendered himself in the square, and her window looks upon it. Is there to be a second escape, Shasta?"

The caller gave a low laugh.

"You would not think so if you were to see the jury."

"Name it over."

It was done, Leo seeming to weigh the worth of each man as he was mentioned.

"I don't know Burke Brown," he remarked.

"I do," and Shasta Sam's lips met resolutely behind the reply. "He won't waver with the others against him. I want him right where he is."

"Some of your work, Shasta?"

"No. Fate had a hand in the selection."

"I think fortune's fingers are in it, too, eh, captain?"

"My fortune, Leo," laughed the big sport, whom we saw last in a mountain mine many miles from Deadwood.

Shasta Sam had come back on the trail of the deserter reported by the young overseer who was willing to receive a bullet at the hands of the man he served for letting the deserter escape, and if he had watched Burke Brown with such an eagle eye, had he not found the man he wanted?

There was no place in Deadwood large enough to hold court in.

The gold-town had never expected a case of such importance, and it was decided to conduct the trial at the edge of town where a lot of trees cast a cooling afternoon shade.

Shasta Sam, still wearing the beard one shade lighter than his mustache, walked from Leo's cabin as the crowd began to arrange itself under the pines.

Several tables had been carried to the spot, and a long bench with a rough back provided for the jury.

Within the inclosure stood the detective's horse, and near by was seen the fine figure of the cool head himself.

Shasta Sam could not help being impressed by

the man whose life he had twice attempted—once in the streets of Deadwood and again on the trail.

Had the Atlantic sleuth any forces in reserve? If he had not, what had brought him back for trial when there was no hope?

While Shasta looked, the well known figure of Maverick separated from the crowd and crossed to the Committee of Safety seated at one of the tables.

There was a whisper over the board, and then it was announced that the trial would begin.

CHAPTER XXXI.

HOLDING HIS GROUND.

If Leon Talbot had possessed a private wire extending from the court-room under the pines to his house, he could not have been kept better informed of the progress of events.

He had only to sit in his private-room and hear the reports brought by the messengers constantly on the move between the two places.

His hand was in every move. The jury had been chosen according to his commands for the most officious member of the Committee of Safety was ready to second his every wish.

He was told when the trial was about to begin, and the next courier informed him that the indictment had been read to the prisoner.

"By Jove! I must see the game from now on!" cried the nabob. "Captain Coldgrip is in the grasp of fate, and I want him to know that the hand that is crushing him is mine."

The fingers of White Beard the mute touched his arm as he left his chair, and Talbot looked severely into the old man's face.

"No. I don't want advice," exclaimed the gold king pushing back the tablet which was thrust forward. "If there was danger from any possible hand I would not go. But the New York sleuth is safe I tell you," and Talbot jerked loose and walked toward the door.

But White Beard was not to be repulsed thus.

A bound carried him to the millionaire, and Talbot was arrested by a hand that seemed to sink into his flesh.

"I've got to humor him, but he shall not keep me back from the finale," he muttered and for the next few seconds the writing tablet was kept warm.

"That man is capable of playing any hand," wrote White Beard.

"Not when in a death net like the one that meshes him."

"He is great in expedients. He keeps his most telling cards for the last."

"He played them when he had the spy come in the nick of time."

"Captain Claude's trail started in New York."

"It ends in Deadwood."

"He knows you."

"If he does not, he will before the sun goes down."

The mute took back the tablet, but did not reply.

Colonel Cupid retired to his dressing-room and attired himself in the suit so well known to the Deadwood people. The velvet of the collar was carefully brushed, and the cravat had the neatest tie it had ever known.

As the nabob crossed the square faced by the Gold Brick Hotel and turned toward the Black Hills court, he heard a voice whose sound was familiar.

"Gentlemen of the jury, the prisoner is here to answer to the charge of taking the life of Jack Bodinot, commonly called Jacinto Jack. It shall be for you to weigh the evidence and deliver the verdict. Murder is a crime against the laws of the Territory of Dakota. The Committee of Safety sitting on my right asks that the guilty be punished and the innocent set at liberty. We ask the same. If the prisoner be proven guilty, the crime must be punished. That he is guilty, we, the State, expect to prove to your satisfaction."

Colonel Talbot saw the figure of the speaker before he finished.

The "Attorney for the Commonwealth," was Maverick, and his tall figure rose within a few feet of the doomed detective while he spoke.

Talbot approached without any attempt at concealment, and was quickly seen and greeted.

The crowd in front of Captain Claude made a lane for him, and a minute later he took a seat with the rest of the committee.

A look passed swiftly between the two men.

There was a gleam of triumph in the nabob's eyes, but the Atlantic spotter returned it with a look that gave out no clew to his intentions.

The first witness was the man who had found Jacinto Jack, then followed the testimony of those who had seen Captain Claude in Deadwood the night of the tragedy. Several testified to having seen him ride through town toward the south trail a short time before the body was found.

After these men, Maverick introduced Custer Charley, the proprietor of Fortune's Folly. This man narrated the detective's visit to the room where Jacinto Jack's effects were stored. He had passed an hour in the place, and the witness said he believed the dead man's chest had been searched.

Such was the "coil of circumstances" which Captain Claude's foes wound around him.

Witness followed witness, and each succeeding one added a link to the chain.

So Deadwood thought.

Maverick had courtesy enough to turn the witnesses over to the prisoner for cross-examination, but the detective rejected the favor with a gesture.

"We are through," announced Prosecutor Maverick as he dismissed the last witness, and flung a look toward the man whose inaction had made him a mystery to all. "I believe the defense has a turn at the wheel now. The defense! By Jupiter! I don't see any," he added half audibly, taking his seat.

"The defense!" called one of the committee. "Captain, if you wish to be heard in your own behalf, that time has arrived."

Beyond the circle, for the New York detective stood within a ring of swarthy faces and stalwart figures, one could have heard the fall of a pine burr.

"Have you no witnesses?" continued the same voice.

"I have witnesses," was the reply. "One of them, unfortunately, is dead on the mountain. He knows whose knife came down the night he died, but the dead keep their secrets, much to the joy of the guilty living. I have another witness, however; you call him Colonel Leon Talbot."

The last sentence fell like a thunderbolt.

The encircling audience turned to the nabob and saw a smile of derision form on his lips, although he changed color a shade.

Captain Coldgrip did not look toward the Deadwood Croesus when he spoke his name, but a moment later he confronted him and continued blandly:

"You will excuse me, colonel, but I called you as a witness for the defense."

"I am not in this case at all," was the response, and the eyes of the two men met again.

"When did you retire from it, may I ask?"

Leon Talbot flushed, and felt the blood tingle through his veins while he tried to keep cool.

"Ah! you refuse to honor my draft, do you?" resumed the detective.

"Tell him no," whispered Maverick who stole a glance at the jury—twelve solemn dark-shirted men in the extemporized jury box.

Colonel Cupid heard the words.

"I honor all drafts in the interest of justice," he said to Captain Claude, and then he crossed his legs and added: "Proceed."

"The Court may understand that I was in Deadwood the night of the tragedy, that I left it at the hour mentioned by several witnesses. What I do deny is the killing of Jacinto Jack. Now, Colonel Talbot, when did you last see Jack?"

The looks of the crowd went to the conscripted witness. He was ready.

"When? Several hours before they found him on the trail."

"You had known Jack for years?"

"Yes."

"You knew him when he was plain John Bodinot, of Last Chance Camp?"

Colonel Cupid smiled.

"You are getting into water too deep for me," he replied. "Last Chance Camp did you say?"

"I mentioned it." And the New York detective turned to the six men of the tribunal and continued:

"I may explain here, gentlemen, that I am going back a few steps in the history of two men—the living and the dead. I shall refresh Colonel Talbot's memory by saying that Last Chance Camp was built in the heart of the Sierra and almost in the shadow of Shasta itself."

"I'll admit that it was," exclaimed the nabob. "I have not tried to keep my brief residence there from the citizens of Deadwood, neither have I deemed it important enough for promiscuous publication. Yes, I knew John Bodinot in Last Chance Camp."

"He came to Deadwood after your sudden rise?"

"Yes."

"You told him that he could remain here on one condition?"

"I refuse to go back over a history of no importance just now," answered Talbot. "The man on trial for his life is a detective—one of those people who resort to all manner of tricks to accomplish their ends. I say I refuse to be a party to a scheme which must have for its purpose the defeat of justice in Deadwood."

"Very well," retorted Captain Coldgrip. "I am entitled to a full statement in my own behalf. If Colonel Talbot refuses to be questioned, he will not interrupt me during my reply."

Something was coming.

Leon Talbot felt that the Gotham sleuth was about to play the card he had held back.

He saw in the eager craning forward of necks the breathless interest and anxiety of the spectators.

Maverick the prosecutor was within touch of him on the left.

In a moment he was leaning toward the big fellow.

"Are you going to permit this?" he exclaimed. "Don't you see he is going to prolong the session of the court till dark. Then his infernal spy-pard will launch another handful of trumps into our faces."

Maverick caught the words eagerly. He wanted something of the kind.

"I would suggest that the prisoner confine his remarks to the night of Jacinto Jack's death," he cried, addressing the tribunal of judges. "Any attempt to do otherwise will prolong the sittings of this court to a late hour."

The crowd showed its approval in numerous nods and expressions.

"I shall not detain you ten minutes," the detective said with a look at the nabob.

"Let him go on," came unexpectedly from the crowd, and those who looked saw the speaker, a man whose beard was a shade lighter than his mustache.

The committee consulted.

"The prisoner may proceed," announced one of the six.

"You'll excuse me then," exclaimed Talbot. "I am not compelled to remain here to hear a man talk against daytime."

And without waiting to be answered, the Croesus of Deadwood walked away, watched with a smile by the Atlantic sleuth.

The crowd made way for him, and he passed out.

"We'll finish him, anyhow, colonel," said a voice at his back, and at the same moment a hand closed on his arm. "The jury has made up its verdict, and the Yankee sleuth has already read death in the eyes of the twelve."

Colonel Cupid drank in Maverick's words with eager delight.

"Go back and see to the details," he cried. "Stop the fellow's story in some manner if he gets too personal. And when the verdict has been reached, send me word."

"It shall be done."

Talbot walked on while Maverick went back.

"Just now it is a drawn battle, but the end is mine," the former murmured. "The man is more dangerous than I deemed him. While he lives I cannot reach the treasure of Lost Angel bonanza."

CHAPTER XXXII.

A SHOT FROM WITHOUT.

A SILENT greeting awaited the nabob of Deadwood in his own house.

His very countenance told White Beard that the trail, as far as it had progressed, had not gone to suit him.

The playing thus far was with the detective, but Talbot had not given up the game. Not he.

He knew the men who held the fate of Captain Coldgrip in their hands, and Maverick had promised him that his enemy should not escape from the toils.

Despite the wish of the mountain court to get through early in the afternoon, the proceedings threatened to exhaust the day.

"Why don't I get news?" cried Talbot. "The Yankee sleuth-hound was granted ten minutes for a personal statement. Is he still talking against time? He could not twist me into a witness for his side of the case. No, by Jove! I went so far and could be dragged no further. That was his card, and I saw it before he threw it upon the board. His story, even if Maverick does not choke it off, and he said he would, will not turn the tables."

It was thirty minutes after Colonel Cupid's return home before he received a messenger from the outside.

The sun was dropping below the western hills and before long night would once more spread her wings over Deadwood.

An eager question was on Talbot's lips when the man walked forward and threw a bit of paper upon the table.

Had the trial ended, and was the New York ferret condemned?

"Gods! what means this?" cried the Deadwood nabob, glancing up at the man, and then he flung the paper to White Beard while he turned his whole attention to the messenger.

"I don't know what Maverick wrote," was the reply.

"But you know what took place at the trial after I came away."

"Yes."

"Well, did the people believe his story?"

"I did not."

"But the crowd—Deadwood?"

"I don't know."

Meanwhile the mute had read the contents of the paper, and his fingers were writing on his tablet.

"A hung jury means acquittal unless we act promptly," read Talbot, when the slate was thrust into his hands.

He answered with a nod and turned to the messenger again.

"Who is the stubborn man—the stranger called Burke Brown, eh?"

"We can't tell."

There was a short silence.

"What was the purport of the story? No, you need not tell me. It was against me, though?"

"Of course. He made a direct accusation."

"Against me?"

"Yes. He said—"

The man did not know whether to proceed or not. From the aspect of the nabob's countenance he evidently thought he had gone far enough.

Talbot took in a long breath.

"What did the villain say?" he asked.

"He accused you of killing Jacinto Jack—not with your own hand, but by the issuance of secret orders."

"He did this, and Maverick did not try to check him?"

"Captain Maverick did his best, but the court let the prisoner go on."

"The court wants him cleared. Don't I know why?" and Colonel Cupid clinched the hand that rested on the table. "I've got too much for the gentlemen who serve on the Committee of Safety. I'm too rich for their blood. But the jury should decide without being influenced by these things. *That was the intention before the trial began.*"

"Have you any orders?" asked the messenger, drawing back.

"Yes; I want Maverick here at once."

The Deadwood Croesus was told by the opening of the door that the sun had gone down, leaving a brief twilight, but little better than the shades of night.

All at once he whirled upon White Beard and took the writing tablet from his hands.

"The crisis is here," he wrote. "If you don't want to stay, you will find horses in the stables. I am going to fight the game to a finish where I am. The mistake has been with the jury. The twelfth man, Burke Brown, whoever he is, is the worker of all the mischief. It cannot be that Deadwood believes the story Captain Coldgrip told."

At this point Talbot's wrist was touched by White Beard's finger.

The mute's pencil wrote under Talbot's last sentence.

"What was that story?"

"I guess he reviewed the whole history."

"The New York part, too?"

"There's no doubt of it. You know what that is."

A wild look lit up the depths of White Beard's eyes.

"He has no proofs!" his pencil said.

"These man-hunters don't run blindly over a trail. And one like Claude Coldgrip does not cross the continent to find nothing."

"The more the need, then, of a quick, desperate play," flashed White Beard's pencil, and the next moment he sprung up and strode to the door.

"If I thought it good policy," smiled Talbot, gazing at the man whose passions were aroused, "I would let him throw a card which would end the game as far as the New York sleuth is concerned. The blows of that silent tiger never fail. But I dare not unchain him just yet. The victory would not be wholly mine."

White Beard seemed to cool down at the door for he soon came back and looked steadily into Talbot's face.

"We should have more news by this time," muttered the Dakota nabob. "Maverick should be here. I wish it had been Shasta Sam in his prime instead of Maverick."

To talk of a certain spirit, it is said, is to summon it before you.

Maverick came in almost before the thought had left the nabob's mind.

Colonel Cupid attempted to read the face which crossed the room to the table where he waited.

Maverick stood on no ceremony.

"Maverick," he said.

The Deadwood nabob started in his chair.

"To Hades with a jury like that!" cried Talbot. "I left it to my friends, and I thought—"

"Your friends are with you yet," interrupted the dark-skinned man. "We are human. We failed on two jurors."

"Burke Brown and what other?"

"Burke Brown was for guilty. He voted every ballot for death. The frauds are Humboldt and Kramer."

"Those men?—the last I would have suspected."

"So thought all of us. There is no verdict."

"But the prisoner?"

"He is practically free."

"Free but not safe, eh, Maverick?"

"Safe? No!"

"What was his story?"

"Your life history."

A grim smile was forced to Leon Talbot's lips.

"Was it interesting?" he asked.

"It was a surprise to Deadwood."

"How many believed it?"

"More than you think."

"But you did not, Maverick?"

"No."

"Thanks! What is to be the sleuth's next play?"

"He will follow up his success."

"If we let him. Did he mention the man on my right?"

Maverick glanced at White Beard and shook his head.

"Not directly, but we understood a certain reference."

Talbot turned to the mute and wrote:

"Maverick says that it is best for you to go away for the present."

White Beard looked up at Maverick, then, with a glance at Talbot, rose and left the room.

"What caught the two jurors?" asked Talbot, leaning suddenly toward his captain.

"No one knows."

"The Court was for the prisoner, don't you think?"

"It was."

"Because I am Leon Talbot," cried the nabob. "See here, Maverick. I can fight the goldbugs of Deadwood as well as the man from New York. What is the hour?"

The young millionaire glanced at his own watch as he put the question.

"Go back and keep track of the Atlantic spotter. Within twenty minutes you shall have final orders."

"If he quits Deadwood—"

"He must not be permitted to do so. Let him think that the tide has fairly turned—that he has achieved a victory over Talbot of Deadwood."

"Maybe you can't hoodwink this man."

"Not for twenty minutes? Why, they catch foxes in traps."

Colonel Cupid laughed, but Maverick did not join him in his humor.

"I'll try my hand, colonel," answered the Deadwood sport, stepping back. "Shall I come for orders?"

"No: they will be sent. Hold him twenty minutes. Don't disturb the jurors. We'll pay them off in the near future. Only keep the New York ferret in Deadwood till you hear from me."

Talbot walked into the room beyond whose door White Beard had disappeared a few moments before.

"I'm glad he's gone," the nabob thought when he found the apartment empty. "He might oppose the move I am about to make. If Maverick carries out my instructions, and he certainly will, the man from Broadway got but a breathing spell from the Deadwood jury."

The Dakota mine-owner returned to the private room.

"Hello! another man! No messenger this time," he cried answering with quick steps the raps at the door.

"Colonel Talbot, eh?" asked the young man in mining clothes who entered the room without an invitation.

"I am Leon Talbot."

"My name is Burke Brown—"

"One of the late jurors?"

"Yes."

"Well, what is it?"

The next second the sound of shattered glass was mingled with the report of a revolver, and the twelfth juror pitched headlong across the room and dropped with a gasp at the foot of the wall!

CHAPTER XXXIII.

FOR OLD FRIENDSHIP'S SAKE.

"He would sell me out, would he? I don't think he will."

These words were spoken by the man who turned his back on Leon Talbot's house and walked away while the startled nabob was bending over the lifeless body of Burke Brown, the twelfth juror.

There was nothing for the Deadwood money king to do; the man was already dead.

"This man came to me on important business," muttered Talbot. "He was followed and shot dead by somebody who wanted to keep his lips sealed," and then the millionaire sport left the corpse and went to the window.

The night breeze came in through the shattered pane, but he saw nothing, heard no sound.

"I wonder if Captain Coldgrip's spy pard can be killing off the jurors who voted for death?" suddenly exclaimed Talbot, stepping back hurriedly as if the thought had startled him. "Well, if that is the game, the hothead will have his hands full."

Meanwhile the man who had sent a bullet through Burke Brown's head walked coolly through the street to the cabin of the man called Leo.

There he threw off the beard which covered the lower part of his face and stood revealed as Shasta Sam.

"They did not convict the Yankee spotter!" cried Leo. "I thought Colonel Cupid would have played a better game."

"He did the best he could," answered Shasta, a peculiar smile flitting across his countenance. "The truth is, Leo, the prisoner was too much for him."

"They say he read the colonel's history from a time long before he saw Deadwood."

"He did."

"Is that what turned the tide?"

"It helped in that direction. But Colonel Cupid is no longer nabob of Deadwood unless he plays a hand swift as a lightning's bolt, and as deadly."

"I understand. Do you think he will play such a hand?"

"He is not the man I think him if he does not."

"What course of action will you suggest to him?"

"I am not suggesting," and a laugh parted Shasta Sam's lips.

Leo's look instantly became a fixed stare of wonder.

"Can it be possible? You want this man out of the way, don't you?"

"Of course."

"Yet you will not assist the man whose acknowledged lieutenant you have been."

"Let us stop here," responded Shasta Sam with a gesture of satiety. "I have come to you for a secret before I ride away."

"Ah, you are going off just before the death-grapple by the two giants."

"I am leaving Deadwood. The mission that brought me back I have fulfilled to the letter. Tell me, Leo—First, are we alone?"

"We are alone."

Shasta Sam took a step nearer the man whose infirmity—a paralyzed limb—kept him almost constantly in a peculiarly-fashioned chair.

When he stopped he bent over Leo until their faces nearly touched.

"What I would ask is about the girl, Coralie," he went on.

"Proceed, Shasta."

"Is she really mad Barton's child?"

"She is."

Shasta Sam drew back and looked at Leo steadily for a moment.

"You tell me this on your honor, Leo?"

"On my honor."

"Might she not be the child of Barton's companion?"

"The man who was murdered in New York four years ago? That man, Cyrus Blonden, had a daughter who was stolen when quite small. He was much older than Barton, and his child was missing before Coralie was born. Does not this settle it, Shasta?"

"It would seem so," replied the big sport, but still in doubt. "If you say this on your honor, Leo, I am bound to believe. But was nothing ever heard of Blonden's child?"

"Nothing definite. I used to have in my possession some old papers of the times, in which were accounts of the kidnapping, and descriptions of the child."

"I suppose she could not be recognized to-day even if found."

"Not unless by the scar of a burn on the left arm, but that she may have outgrown. I used to think I would know her. She was the counterpart of her father, had his eyes and all that. But why all this? The girl will never turn up."

"Perhaps not, Leo. I think I will go now. When the Centaur comes—"

"The Centaur is here!"

The glance sent by Leo toward the door made Shasta turn, and Deadwood Duke, with his broken arm in a sling, stood before him.

"The Atlantic cop deserves success almost for his cool fight for life," cried the Centaur.

"You have heard of the last move, Shasta?"

"If it was made during the last ten minutes I know nothing about it."

"There is to be another trial."

"For the killing of Jacinto Jack?"

"Yes."

"Who asked it?"

"No one has asked it. By Jove! I don't think you understand me. Colonel Cupid is to be the prisoner at the bar."

A strange cry was Shasta's answer.

"King yesterday, beggar to-day," continued Deadwood Duke. "I have just advised Maverick. Unless Leon Talbot rides from Deadwood at once, he will be a prisoner within the hour."

Shasta Sam flashed up like powder.

"Not to save himself from Captain Coldgrip!" he cried. "I can't forget that he has been my old master. I said to Leo awhile ago that I intended to let the two giants fight it out among themselves. I know what the New York sleuth wants. He came from the city by the sea for two things, but especially for Colonel Talbot. So Deadwood turns on the man who made it, eh? He is to be looped by the men who have been paid from his treasury, is he? And all for the death of a man whose ambition was to change suits three times a day. I am still in the game!"

"Did you hear the detective's statement?"

"Yes."

"Colonel Cupid may have wanted to keep Jacinto Jack's lips sealed?"

"What of it? Three fourths of the inhabitants of the Black Hills at this time would like to have the whole world keep silent. Where is the colonel?"

"At home if he has not fled."

"By heavens! if he has he will be dragged back and made to face the enemy."

Less than a minute later Shasta Sam was walking rapidly toward the abode of the Deadwood nabob.

There was eagerness in his gait, and quiet determination in his look.

"I did not expect to go back there, but, hang it all, circumstances drive me thither. I will

find a dead man in the house of the living, but the secret is safe. And Nadir will smile when I go back to the mine."

A singular quiet hung about the best known house in Deadwood.

It was a quiet that breathed of desertion.

Shasta Sam glanced at the shattered pane which told the story of the deadly pistol-shot, and then opened the door.

All Deadwood knew that a key had never turned in the locks of the nabob's portals.

"Aha! you come after the battle!" exclaimed the voice that greeted Sam in the room beyond the front chamber, and the tensely drawn visage of Colonel Cupid looked up from a table covered with papers.

"It is yet to be bought if I have heard aright. Do you know what threatens?"

"Yes."

The reply was accompanied by a smile that seemed to give the face of the nabob some color.

"Deadwood turns on the man who has emptied his coffers into her lap."

There was bitterness in every syllable of Talbot's utterance.

"Did you hear the story?"

"I heard it."

"Well, Deadwood credits the whole statement. I am the assassin of Jacinto Jack. But that is not all. Captain Coldgrip left New York with the expressed purpose of finding me. Do you know for what, Shasta Sam?"

The Black Hills sport did not reply.

"He did not tell this at the trial, but Deadwood knows it all the same," Talbot went on.

"Did you see any one in the front room?"

"It was dark."

"But it has a tenant," and Talbot caught up the lamp and started forward.

Shasta Sam followed, a curious look in his eyes.

"This is the guest I have," said Talbot, holding the light over the body of a man lying against the wall. "This is Burke Brown the twelfth juror. Shot by whom, Shasta Sam? Ah! you can guess."

"I know," was the answer, but Talbot did not mistrust the emphasis of the sport's words. "This is not the matter in hand. You are to meet Deadwood."

"I have just met it."

The sport looked into the young millionaire's face.

"You have? In what way?" he cried.

"I have sent ten of the coolest and most desperate men alive to kidnap Captain Coldgrip, and to conduct him at the pistol-muzzle to a certain spot where I will meet them within an hour. If you had come sooner, Shasta Sam, you should have led the band; as it is, I have entrusted it to Maverick."

"To a man who has twice failed," Shasta answered through clinched teeth. "If he fails again what?"

"Then I ride from Deadwood with every dollar I possess in the world, and elsewhere I'll establish a gold kingdom into which no Captain Coldgrip shall ever ride!"

Colonel Cupid looked at his watch and mentally noted the hour.

"This man is equal to the occasion," thought Shasta Sam. "Ten to one that he will win against the best sleuth on the continent. I am here to play my last hand for him. I must see that Maverick and his desperate pards do not fail. My secret is not safe while the Broadway ferret hunts."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

CHECKED IN THE MOUNTAINS.

WHITE BEARD had left Deadwood.

The man of mystery had taken a horse quietly from the nabob's stables and departed.

What his thoughts were will never be known, but if his countenance was an index to the feeling within, he was going away reluctantly.

Once he seemed on the eve of going back.

Just beyond Deadwood he looked back, while his eyes got an eager light.

The mute was still undecided.

High overhead hung the silver shield of the moon, and the soft light bathed rock and tree in weird beauty.

Approaching White Beard from the south was a horse he did not see.

Mute that he was, he could not have halted any one if he had seen him.

"What is that?—somebody from Deadwood?" queried the rider of the strange steed, and the animal was guided to one side of the trail and the person leaned forward and listened.

"We can pass here. The trail is wide enough for that. I am anxious to see who has left Leon Talbot's capital. It may be the nabob himself. Ah! I will know in a moment."

The watcher beside the trail was a woman, not young in years like Coralie, but handsome for all.

The approach of White Beard had been heralded by the winds and the mountain echoes, and it was for him she waited with an eagerness betrayed by her dark and expressive eyes.

Out of the shadows at length rode the man of mystery, and horse and rider appeared to the woman in the saddle.

"Heavens! this must be the man who come and goes at night," fell from the woman's tongue. "They call him White Beard for want of a better name. He is Colonel Cupid's pard and counselor—the man to whom he owes not a little of his wealth. There was a man in the New York drama who played a mysterious hand, but Leon told me that he was killed while resisting arrest. I saw that man once, and, as I live, this one looks like him."

In another minute White Beard had come up.

"I want information and this man can give it," exclaimed the woman. "I must know what has happened in Deadwood."

She urged her steed toward the center of the trail, and then checked White Beard's before he discovered her.

The mute recoiled and looked at her.

"Good-night. You do not know me, but there is a man in Deadwood who does. You are his friend. Men call you White Beard."

There was no answer for the tongue in the listener's head was silent.

"Would you know me? I am Lucia," the woman went on. "Leon Talbot may have spoken of me to you. I am the woman who saved the Deadwood nabob from the clutches of the New York man-hunters, at the risk of my own liberty. And he has paid me back! Yes! he sent me toward Denver under escort, but that escort was previously instructed to leave me somewhere for the vultures. How eagerly Colonel Cupid threw off the old love for a new! He forgets Lucia in the looks of the girl whose father lost his head over a hidden bonanza. You know this man, White Beard. Report makes you his admirer—his confidant. Is all this true?"

White Beard drew forth the inseparable slate and pencil, and handed them to the astonished woman with a queer smile at the corners of his mouth.

"I see!" cried Lucia at once. "All my words have been wasted on you, White Beard," and she took the tablet and began to write on her knee.

Never before had woman been more closely watched by man.

A most singular expression had settled down on White Beard's face.

"What has occurred in Deadwood?" Lucia wrote.

The man took the tablet and quickly read the question by aid of the moon.

"It is no place for a woman," he replied.

"Has the detective come back?"

"Captain Coldgrip has been tried and condemned."

A cry broke over Lucia's lips.

"Tried and condemned? I would like to know by whom, and for what?"

White Beard made a sign that he could not tell the story in its details.

Lucia smiled but did not insist.

"Is Leon Talbot there?" she asked.

"He may be."

"He was there when you left?"

White Beard nodded.

"One more question and I will let this man proceed," thought the woman, as she took the tablet again.

"Are you not the man called Foxglove in New York a few years ago?"

White Beard glanced at the writing and then caught Lucia's eye.

"The arrow went home!" she cried. "This is the man who, with another person, was concerned in the murder mystery which baffled the best detectives—Captain Coldgrip among them."

The next second the nabob's comrade darted toward her, and his hand closed at her wrist before she could draw back.

She saw the dancing eyes of the mysterious mute, and then felt the grip tighten as if the fingers were forcing their way to the bone.

No words were needed to tell her that she had identified him; his face confirmed all.

As suddenly as White Beard had executed the movement, he fell back, but continued to regard Lucia.

"I know you now!" said the woman, and the workings of her lips with the moonlight on her face gave him the sentence as quickly as the pencil could have done.

He caught eagerly at the slate and Lucia watched his fingers with breathless curiosity.

"You know me? I am Foxglove, am I? What did I do to have two names?"

"You were wanted by the New York police as Foxglove. You know for what."

White Beard, instead of showing Lucia a flashing eye, merely smiled.

"Well," he wrote, "I am here. Why don't they take me?"

There was no reply.

"The ferret back in Deadwood—the man who, ere this, has reached the end of his last chase—crossed the continent for Foxglove. He found Colonel Talbot instead. Are you going up to Deadwood?"

The answer was a nod.

"Beware!" wrote the mute's pencil.

"There is a threat in that. Leon Talbot does not like people to come back from the dead. Is he nearer to Lost Angel bonanza to-day than he was when he had fifty spies on mad Barton's

heels? White Beard, or Foxglove, you would stand between the Dakota nabob and those who would thwart him. You are the man who did the work in New York—your hand executed the plans formed in another's brain."

Lucia drew off while White Beard read, and laid her hand on a revolver among the folds of her habit.

He looked up with a flash and saw the space now between them.

A look of disappointment crossed his face.

"Go on!" smiled Lucia, pointing down the trail while White Beard regarded her; "I am to keep away from Deadwood because Leon Talbot is powerful there? But you don't hear me, although some people of your stamp read by the lips. Good-night, Foxglove."

White Beard made a gesture of detention, and held up his tablet.

"I prefer not to bridge the space between us!" cried Lucia, with a shake of the head. "Your hand has a grip I care not to experience. Good-night, White Beard, if that name suits you better."

The horses parted, and the old love of the Deadwood nabob went up the trail stared at by the man left behind.

"So they have the detective in the toils, have they?" Lucia exclaimed. "Flushed with victory, Leon Talbot will turn to the next conquest. But he will find a serpent in his path, he will learn that the course of love in Deadwood has not an even flow."

The horse felt the urging spur as Lucia finished, and a moment later he was carrying the woman swiftly over the famous trail.

As for White Beard, he watched her out of sight, and then reluctantly moved on.

Not long afterward, New York Lucia rode through the scattered suburbs of Deadwood. There was nothing to tell her of the exciting scenes just witnessed there.

She rode on toward the mountain city's heart.

"Is the town deserted?" cried she.

At that moment she came upon the square.

"No, Deadwood is Deadwood yet," and then she saw a crowd in front of the Gold Brick Hotel, and the voices of men in subdued discussion reached her ears.

"Lucia! woman! you have gone far enough," a voice cried, and she saw a man spring to her steed's bridle. "You promised me that you would not come back. Let me take you away. It is best."

New York Lucia had recognized the man, and she submitted without a word until they had left the square.

"Tell me what this means," she cried, bending forward and touching his shoulder. "I was told in the mountains that they had netted the detective."

"So they have. Deadwood was too much for Captain Coldgrip, after all."

"Where is he?"

"Not here, you may depend. Those men back yonder haven't recovered from the thunderbolt. I never saw anything like it. The best cards are held back, you know. Well, that is what the colonel did."

Lucia was perplexed and impatient.

"You only whet my appetite for news, Shasta Sam," she exclaimed. "Tell me what they've done with the New York sleuth."

"In a moment. I want you to see Leo first."

"Leo?" echoed Lucia.

"Yes; here we are," and as Shasta Sam stopped the horse in front of a cabin, he pushed open a door and disclosed a man reclining in a chair.

"I don't know, Leo," thought Lucia. "Who can he be?"

CHAPTER XXXV.

MAVERICK'S SWOOP.

NEW YORK LUCIA had come back to Deadwood a little too late to see what Shasta Sam had called "the coolest piece of business" he ever saw.

We can now go back to it.

The reader will recollect that Leon Talbot told Sam in his own house that he had sent ten men to carry the New York detective from Deadwood; or, if forcibly resisted, to end his career where found.

Such were the orders received by Maverick and communicated to the men he was to lead.

Captain Coldgrip had acquitted himself of the charge of murder in the minds of two-thirds of the citizens of Deadwood.

Not only this, but he had adroitly turned the tables on the Black Hills nabob without directly charging him with any crime.

There were strange whisperings after the trial.

Men who did not like detectives on general principles were ready to declare that Captain Claude should have "a fair show" and that the guilty, whoever he might be, should be punished.

If Talbot won it meant more wealth for him, and probably the discovery of Lost Angel Mine, the hunt for which had cost mad Barton his life.

The New York spotter was set at liberty by

the Committee of Safety after the dismissal of the jury.

Not until then was the message, written as we have seen by Coralie and entrusted to the young doctor, placed in his hands.

Failure to deliver it sooner was not Doctor Frank's fault. The keen, watchful eyes of the detective's enemies had prevented it.

Captain Claude knew that the message was from Coralie, and therefore important.

His hands opened it at the first opportunity.

"Shut no eye while in Deadwood," ran the young girl's warning. "When you think yourself safest you are in the greatest danger. Leon Talbot reserves his best cards for the last throw. He is famous for this. If they acquit you, look out. You have driven the nabob of Deadwood to desperation."

"The girl is my friend," thought the sleuth. "Of course she has my thanks for this message, but Colonel Cupid must strike soon if he would get in the first blow."

A short time after the acquittal the detective had a secret meeting with the tribunal of public safety.

There was no doubt of the rivalry between Leon Talbot and the members of the committee. Talbot had too many mines; his power over certain classes was getting too great.

Added to this, he was on the trail of the fabulous Lost Angel Mine. His agents were then abroad in the mountains. If found, it would be turned over to him, and then—well, Talbot would reach the top round of the golden ladder.

The committee was ready for any proposition, but Captain Coldgrip did not favor them with the one they most wanted.

At the lifting of the spotter's finger Talbot would have been arrested for the murder of Jacinto Jack, but it would not have been the captain's victory.

"I have not accused Colonel Cupid of murder," replied the detective to the broad hints thrown out by the committee.

"But you intimated in your statement on trial that he wanted to keep the lips of the dandy sealed by silence."

"So he did, gentlemen, and those lips are thus sealed to-day."

"We are here to punish the guilty."

"So am I. A mission of that sort brought me from New York."

The six exchanged looks of wonder.

"Do we understand that you refuse to accuse Colonel Cupid?"

"I have not the avenging of Jacinto Jack uppermost in my mind."

The meeting broke up, and the six notables of Deadwood chagrined over the result from that moment gave the detective the cold shoulder.

A few steps from the door of the Gold Brick a boy held the detective's horse.

Here and there groups of men were seen, and the appearance of the Atlantic sleuth was a signal for subdued exclamations.

"Hello! Captain Coldgrip!" suddenly called out a voice, and the figure of Maverick advanced as the detective whirled toward him.

In another minute up went the hand of Maverick, and at the same time nine men with cocked revolvers stepped between the detective and the astonished crowd.

"We want this man, gentlemen," said the leader of the band to the people. "We take him unmasked and with the pistol. If there is no law in Deadwood, we may find some elsewhere."

A look of fearlessness came at once into Captain Claude's eyes.

He saw the weapons that covered him, and noticed, too, the stern looks of the eyes behind them.

Coralie's message may have come back to him:

"When you think yourself safest, you are in the greatest danger. If they acquit you, look out."

He had been acquitted.

There was a disposition of sympathy in the crowd for Captain Claude, but confronted by the cool heads who had been chosen with care for the very work they were doing, not a man raised a hand in rescue.

The arrest, for it was nothing else, was followed by a closing in of the detective's foes.

In a little while he was in the midst of the band.

"Forward!" exclaimed Maverick, and the men marched off.

Such a *coup* seemed to paralyze the crowd.

All knew that it was a desperate retaliatory play by Colonel Cupid, and it needed not the visages of Maverick and his fellows to tell the spectators that the Atlantic sleuth was again a doomed man.

Down the middle of the street tramped the bronzed guard, glared at by the crowd left behind, and curiously watched by the six members of the Tribunal of Safety.

"The Yankee detective is gone," went from lip to lip.

"It is a shame, too, after the fight he made. This puts Colonel Cupid on top again."

"Let's play a hand for the trailer."

"Against those revolvers going down street? Some other day, Marmaduke. You can rescue him if you like."

The fellow called Marmaduke was silenced by the last remarks, and the stalwart guard and its prisoner disappeared toward the mystic hills above the south trail.

Such was the play made by Maverick for his master—a play by which he redeemed himself for a show of indecision in front of the late mob.

Captain Coldgrip walked in the midst of the band.

"This is the colonel's play?" said he suddenly to Maverick, whose eye he happened to catch as they were passing the last cabins.

"Do you think so?" grinned Maverick.

"He had one more play."

"Do you blame him?"

"No, Maverick."

On marched the men of Deadwood.

At the end of twenty minutes they reached a spot where their leader called a halt.

"Not here yet," whispered the men among themselves.

Captain Coldgrip took in the situation at a glance.

"Colonel Cupid has failed to meet you, I see," he remarked.

"He will come yet," was the reply.

A few moments before this time the nabob of Deadwood was saddling a horse in his stable.

"The silence tells me enough. Maverick has caught the bird, and is off with him to the appointed spot. He thought his *coup* was the last one. He forgot that I can strike until my hands have been beaten down."

A few seconds later the horse was led forth with the hand of the nabob at the bridle.

"Now for the work that cuts the tiger's claws!" he cried, getting up into the saddle. "After this a successful hunt for the hidden mine, and then a queen for a wife!"

Colonel Cupid turned his horse toward the south, but suddenly started, and threw his hand toward his belt.

"No, colonel. You see I have the drop, and that it is the same old game of last night, only I don't want my horse to carry double this time."

How perplexingly familiar the voice sounded!

If the Cæsar of Deadwood bit his lip and wished the speaker at the antipodes or elsewhere, he will be pardoned by the reader.

"What do you want?" demanded Talbot.

"You were going away?"

"What of it?"

"Don't alter your plans on my account, colonel. In fact, I expect you to ride to your destination just as if I were in China. Come, let us be off."

One of the hands of the speaker rested lightly on the nabob's arm and his body bent forward almost bridged the space between the two horses.

"Play for play. Don't provoke me, colonel. We are going to ride down to where some people are waiting for us. Now off we are!"

"Confound this cool Satan!" growled Deadwood Vanderbilt, but all the same he rode off with the cocked revolver of Sunshine Sam close to his head.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

A FIRE AND A SHOT.

MAVERICK and his comrades waited in the mountains until their impatience began to get the best of them.

Captain Coldgrip kept his temper and watched them closely.

Did the detective know what his spy had done?

"He is here at last!" suddenly exclaimed Maverick, and the Deadwood toughs moved a little closer about their prisoner and looked down the trail where their leader had discovered an approaching object.

"By Jupiter! there are two of them!"

Maverick could not keep back this exclamation.

All at once he threw one foot forward and up went his right hand.

"Halt!" rung out his voice in thrilling tones.

"Rein in where you are, gentlemen, or the result will be fatal to the man in our hands."

The next second the moving figures grew stationary.

"The same trick cannot be played twice," Maverick continued. "Fingers at your triggers, my boys. The blood of Jacinto Jack calls for vengeance, and the play of the detective's spy is not to cheat us out of it."

"All right, Maverick and pards. Life for life! Captain Coldgrip won't touch the ground dead before Talbot of Deadwood pitches from his saddle—you know how."

Sunshine Sam saw what Maverick and his companions did not—the quick meeting of Leon Talbot's lips, and the defiant, half-contemptuous light which flashed up in his eyes.

"Do your duty, Maverick," cried the mountain millionaire. "Carry out my orders as though I were a thousand miles away."

That meant the death of the New York sleuth.

"All that is brag," laughed Sunshine Sam. "Colonel Cupid banks on the thought that I dare not retaliate. Who is he that I should spare him? Gentlemen, I cover the man who came to Deadwood with red hands. Jacinto Jack is neither here nor there just now. We

have crossed the continent from the sea for the man who planned and helped execute the murder of Cyrus Blonden in New York, and I tell you on my oath that it matters little whether we get him dead or alive. In truth, I prefer to leave him here with a bullet in his head."

The words died out among the pines that here and there threw their shadows across the road.

"Is this true?" asked Maverick in a whisper with a look at Captain Claude.

"It is true."

"And you want Leon Talbot for an old crime—for murder in New York?"

"I do."

"Then, by Jove! take the man!"

The startled men could not credit the change.

"Call me out of the game, Colonel Leon," Maverick went on, raising his voice so that the nabob could hear. "If this is for the Blonden business, I throw up my hand. I was in New York when the crime was committed, and among others I looked down into the dead face of the eccentric old man in his own house. That was a dastardly crime. And you planned it, eh? If the men with me want to carry out your orders they can. As for Maverick, he serves no longer the band that struck old Cyrus Blonden in the city by the sea."

"Bought like the jury!" came fiercely over the trail in reply.

"No man accuses Maverick of selling out and lives!"

The Deadwood sport came toward Talbot and his captor.

"This man is mine for he present, Captain Maverick," were the words that met him. "Go back to your men and let us see if they intend to serve the red-handed man of Deadwood."

Maverick walked back.

He saw that the revolvers by which the New York detective had been covered had fallen to their owners' sides.

It told him enough.

"Bring your prisoner up, Sam," exclaimed Captain Claude, and a voice was heard to say "Forward!" in reply.

"Cowards will retire!" cried the Deadwood nabob as he leaned forward and covered the group of men with his fingers. "I thought I issued orders to men. Captain Coldgrip, there are the wretches who have lived off my bounty. Behold the brave men who desert their master at a word from his worst foe!"

Maverick bit his lip under these words, and the men scowled their darkest; but there came not a word in reply.

Half an hour later, a man entered Leon Talbot's house in Deadwood by the rear door.

Striking a match, he went to the private room and unlocked the safe.

Then he lit the lamp and went to work.

The contents of the safe were removed and piled on the floor.

There were maps of mines, deeds, documents of all kinds, worth twice their weight in gold.

The whole amount made a heap of some magnitude when finished.

Not a word had the man uttered since entering the house, but his look bespoke his intentions.

When he had searched the premises, going from room to room and adding to the pile of papers something from each, he placed the lamp on the floor near the heap.

Then he retreated to the door and looked at his work.

All at once he raised his hand. It clutched something like an iron weight.

The next moment he threw the missile forward, launched it straight at the lamp as though it had been an arrow.

In an instant there was a flash of light in the room, for the lamp had been struck and the scattered oil was blazing over the papers.

Still silent, the man shut the door and walked away.

A few steps beyond the nabob's house he found a horse which he mounted.

There was no attempt to fly from his work, and with a fiery room behind him, he slowly rode off as though nothing unusual had occurred.

All this did not occupy much time—a few minutes at the farthest.

Once he looked back.

There was a great blaze in a certain part of Deadwood, and red tongues of flame were enveloping the house of Leon Talbot.

Then, for the first time, did the countenance of the destroyer relax.

A smile crossed it, lingering for an instant, and his eyes got a gleam of mingled victory and pleasure.

All at once a sharp report awoke the night echoes of the landscape around the incendiary.

His horse started at the sound as the man himself fell forward, and the following second the animal was plunging down the trail at break-neck speed.

"Faster! faster!" cried a voice as another horse swept after the first, and the rider, who was a woman, with a wealth of loose black hair streaming on the air, smote her steed's neck again and again.

It was a wild race over a wild trail, through

moonshine and shadow, with the nabob's palace burning behind and the uncertainties of fate before.

By and by the first steed stopped, shivering and exhausted.

Frightened still, and with dilated nostrils that drank in the odor of fresh blood that matted his mane, the animal waited for his pursuer to come up.

He did not have to wait long.

"Ha! caught at last!" exclaimed the woman as she came up and saw the body that clung to the horse trembling before her. "Look up. What do you say now, White Beard, or Foxglove?"

Of course there was no audible reply, but the horse's burden moved when the woman touched it, and she saw the blanched face of Leon Talbot's mysterious comrade—the mute, White Beard.

The eyes became fixed on the woman from the first.

"I wish I could tell you why I did this, White Beard," she exclaimed. "You would call me Lucia if your tongue was not a silent member. You may not know that I am also the daughter of Cyrus Blonden, the man whose life you helped Leon Talbot to in order to possess a will which, when destroyed gave the Deadwood nabob his first start. There is one man in Deadwood who knows more than you think. It is the quiet, unassuming Leo. He proved beyond doubt that I am the missing child of Blonden's. While you may not have had a hand in the kidnapping, White Beard, if you had withheld your dagger, I would have had a father to go to after all these years of separation. You have died first because I find you first after Leo's revelation. Captain Coldgrip wants Colonel Cupid and the lost bonanza. He can't have both. I will take one, and he can turn the other over to the gilded syndicate that sent him after it."

In a strain like this Lucia of New York talked as she bent over the face of the Black Hills mute, whose glassy stare told her that he heard nothing.

Her eyes seemed to laugh at his death gasps.

"I did not come hither to take your life, Foxglove. I came to win back the love of the man whom I saved from the human sleuths of New York. I swore to stand between Captain Coldgrip and his quarry, but I knew not then that the crime the Atlantic sleuth would avenge took my father's life. However, I will stand between those two men yet, but for another purpose, as you shall see, Captain Claude."

A few seconds later New York Lucia rode from the spot unaccompanied.

Behind her and at the edge of a patch of fairy moonlight a man lay at a horse's feet.

And the shadows of the pines as they swayed back and forth touched the face of—White Beard!

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE END OF IT.

THE next day, a man riding horseback away from Deadwood saw a lot of dark specks moving against the soft blue of the sky.

This eye was keen, and he noticed that the objects came lower and lower, until, as he rode on, they looked no higher than the pines.

"Those are the birds that did not get the man whom Colonel Cupid had suspended over the Devil's Basin," murmured the rider, while he watched the vultures. "They won't get to pick Captain Coldgrip's bones unless some of Talbot's avengers overhaul him with his prisoner. They've found something though, the birds have. I will know in a minute."

A few moments afterward, the speaker's horse drew back from an object lying across the trail, and the man leaned forward with unconcealed curiosity.

What was it?

"Ha! the mystery, Old Silent, as we call him, has attracted the birds!" he exclaimed. "I wonder if Lucia did not find him? She left last night almost immediately Leo had established her identity, and I knew there was danger in her eyes. She will turn on Colonel Cupid next; then look out, Captain Claude!"

The man in the saddle was Shasta Sam, and the Deadwood he had just left was not the Deadwood it had been during the past forty-eight hours.

There was a heap of ashes where Talbot's house had stood, and the fire, with the nabob's disappearance, was the general topic in the mountain city's resorts and on the street.

"I win by the colonel's failure, after all," continued the big sport, riding away from the spot where the corpse of White Beard had been left by the fair avenger. "Mallory did not get to sell my bonanza secret to Talbot, but it was on his lips when I stepped in. Ha! Deadwood has wondered where my mine is. The Centaur even chaffed me once with having found the Lost Angel; but he did not think how near the truth he was. I had a secret which I kept zealously from the nabob himself. It is mine still. That which mad Burton could not find fell in my way by accident. Now let the Yankee sleuth and his spy unearth it if they can!"

Some distance from the mute's open-air burying-ground Shasta Sam left the main trail for a side one, and vanished.

"Shall I follow, Captain Claude?" asked a man whose look betrayed his eagerness. "That is Shasta Sam, the nabob's lieutenant, and they say in Deadwood that he has been the luckiest hunter of all. Let me run the Dakota reynard down."

The person thus appealed to shook his head.

"This trail is mine," said he. "Go back to the prize we hold. There lives one who will deprive us of him if opportunity affords the chance."

Then Shasta Sam had a follower, but at a respectful distance.

"What did you discover?" asked Sunshine Sam when the New York detective came back to him with the shadows of another night.

"Let time answer," was the response, and the spy pard said no more.

"Where is the Yankee sleuth?" exclaimed a woman, who looked into Coralie Barton's face near the close of that same day.

"I do not know."

"You would not tell me if you did, would you?"

"Not if you mean to harm him."

"Ah! do you think me dangerous, Coralie?" and the young girl's visitor laughed. "You know, perhaps, that I once swore to baffle the New York detective, but that was before I knew what I know now. I don't seek Captain Coldgrip to harm him, nor to keep his hand back from the Lost Angel."

"What, then?"

"I want to find the man he holds."

"Colonel Cupid?"

"He is that to you, perhaps. To me he is the friend—the partner in crime—of White Beard, or Foxglove."

"Who told you this?" cried the prospector's daughter.

"Never mind. You will not tell me whither Captain Coldgrip and his spy pard have taken their prisoner?"

"I have answered you. I do not know."

New York Lucia went to the door.

"When are you going to take the trail for vengeance, Coralie?" she asked, casting a look back at the young girl.

"I have been avenged."

"You? When?"

"Last night."

Lucia's look became a stare of wonder.

"Tell me," she said.

"Xerxes and his men had a difference among themselves," answered Coralie, with a smile. "They tried to divide the Lost Angel—fatal mine that it is, before they had discovered it. They fought over the spoil like a lot of prairie-wolves. It was the hand of vengeance that strikes from on high. Xerxes himself and four of his lawless followers were killed in the fray; the rest have disappeared. You see, Lucia, that the dead has been avenged by the hand of Heaven."

"It is true," cried the lost child of Cyrus Blonden. "Heaven does not help me, though. I avenge my dead with my own hands."

That was Lucia's last sentence and her farewell also.

Coralie of Deadwood stood alone in her little parlor, and a dozen men saw her visitor ride away with firm-set teeth and visage stern.

The two women never met again.

"Halt!"

It was a stern voice, but a woman's, and the man who heard it reined in his steed and looked forward.

A few yards away and in the middle of the road which ran into Deadwood several miles further on, a woman occupied a saddle, and the stock of a cocked Winchester touched her shoulder.

"Where is the nabob, Captain Coldgrip?" came over the leveled rifle.

"He is safe."

"Which means that he is to be kept from me."

"If you think so."

"I took an oath once to baffle you. I did so in New York. I saved Leon Talbot from your cunning, and made it possible for him to become the Croesus of the Northwest. To save him again and bring your schemes to naught I sought him in his gold kingdom. Then I knew not what he was, but now—now, Captain Coldgrip, the man stands before me unmasked by the story of Leo. Do you know?"

"I know enough, Lucia," was the reply. "But if you want Leon Talbot you must find him."

"You will prevent if you can, will you?"

"Yes. The great triumph of my life shall be to take the gold king of Deadwood back to New York to answer to the crime of murder. You found Foxglove last night. I saw your work awhile ago."

For a moment Lucia looked at the detective and then the hammer dropped noiselessly upon the metallic cartridge.

"Take the prize you have won. I will watch and wait. The sentence that avenges Cyrus

Blonden avenges me. But you have not found the Lost Angel, captain."

The only reply was a smile which seemed to animate the detective's eyes, and without another word New York Lucia plunged into a little patch of oak and pine, and disappeared.

It is three months later, and we are again in Deadwood.

Nobody any longer talks of the Talbot mines, nor of the man who played nabob as only he could play it.

The city has a new excitement.

Captain Coldgrip has just staked off a claim in Coralie's name, and it is an open secret that it contains the old Lost Angel Mine.

Men who have been to the territory return with the most wonderful tales of wealth.

And the half has not been told.

As for Shasta Sam the secret holder, he sleeps in the mine itself where he tried to outwit Captain Coldgrip's famous spy pard, and Deadwood has declared that Coralie shall own and hold the Lost Angel for her father's sake.

After all, the trail from the sea was no failure.

If Captain Claude the sleuth did not get to arrest White Beard, he brought Leon Talbot back to New York, and found the hidden bonanza for mad Barton's child.

Coralie has just become the wife of the young Deadwood doctor, and Sunshine Sam, who has retired, for the present, at least, from the detective business, has been made overseer of the Lost Angel.

New York Lucia has not been seen since the hour she left Captain Coldgrip on the mountain trail.

Beaten at every point except the deadly one she won over Foxglove, she was forced to quit the Hills in no happy frame of mind.

Colonel Cupid escaped the law after all, for between trial and sentence he was found dead in his cell, and a plain pine coffin inclosed the corpse of the once powerful nabob of Deadwood.

We need not multiply words in discussing the chief actor in our mountain drama.

Captain Claude is still "in the business," and the king of American man-hunters.

THE END.

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